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Last Loves of Henri of Navarre

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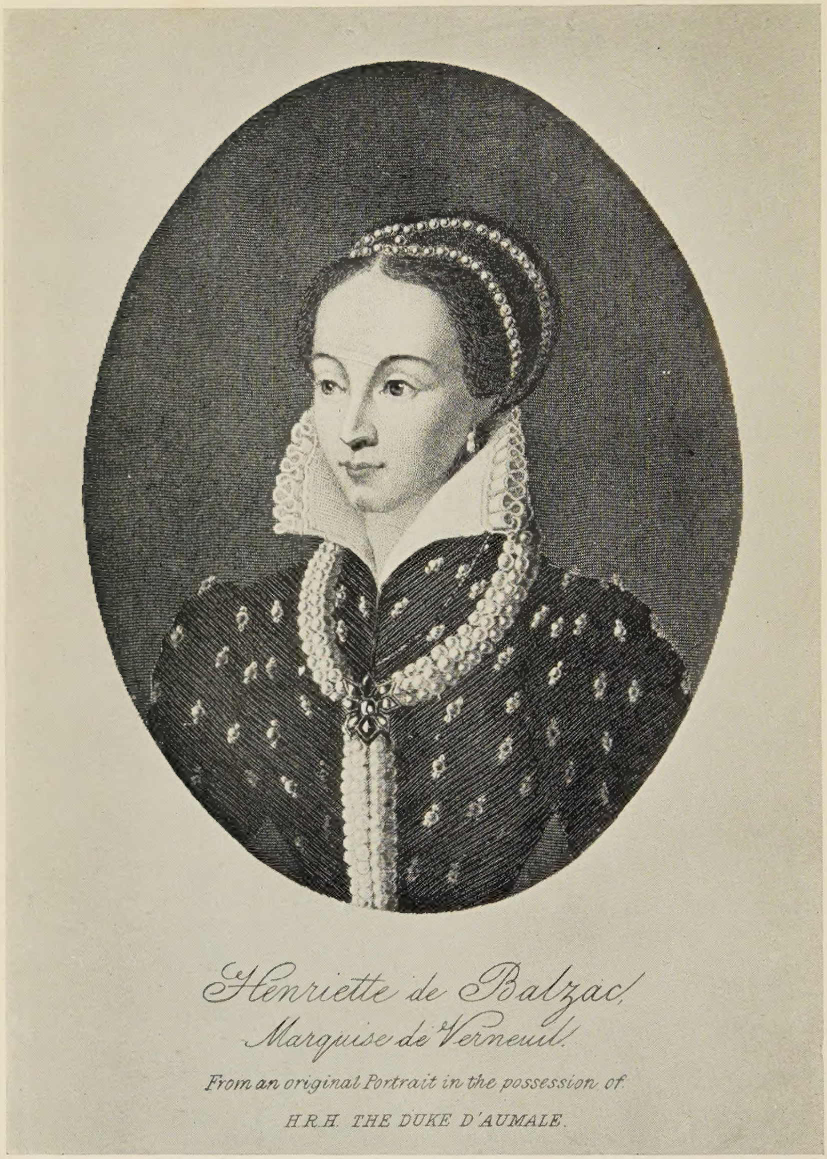
Henriette de Balzac
Marquise de Verneuil.
From an original Portrait in the possession of
H.R.H. THE DUKE D'AUMALE.

Henriette de Balzac d'Entragues, Marquise de Verneuil.

[*Frontispiece.*

Last Loves of Henri of Navarre :: By H. Noel Williams

Author of "Five Fair Sisters," "A Princess of Intrigue,"
:: :: "The Brood of False Lorraine," etc. :: ::

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Henriette de Balzac d'Entragues, Marquise de Verneuil *Frontispiece*
Marguerite de Valois, Queen of Navarre . . . *Facing p.* 10
Henri IV. and Gabrielle Estrées. . . . . ,, 30
Henriette de Balzac d'Entragues, Marquise de Verneuil ,, 42
Marriage by proxy of Marie de' Medici . . . ,, 68
The Maréchal Duc de Biron . . . . . . ,, 110
Maximilien de Bethune, Duc de Sully. . . . ,, 134
Jacqueline de Beuil, Comtesse de Moret . . . ,, 154
Henri IV., King of France . . . . . ,, 182
Charlotte Marguerite de Montmorency, Princesse de Condé . . . . ,, 206
Henri II. de Bourbon, Prince de Condé . . . ,, 232
François Ravaillac, assassin of Henri IV. of Navarre . ,, 268
Coronation of Marie de' Medici, 1610 . . . . ,, 276
Henri IV. entrusting the government to Marie de' Medici ,, 278
Jean Louis de la Vallette, Duc d'Épernon (1554–1642) ,, 296
Statue of Henri IV. (Paris) . . . . . ,, 310

Last Loves of Henri of Navarre

CHAPTER I

Number of the gallant adventures of Henri of Navarre in all probability underestimated rather than exaggerated by historians—His incorrigible amativeness—His first love-affairs—His marriage with Marguerite de Valois—A policy of reciprocal indulgence—Infatuation of the King of Navarre for Madame de Sauve—His rivalry with the Duc d'Alençon over this siren—Escape of Henri from the Court of France—His affair with Mlle. de Tignonville—He is rejoined by his wife, who is accompanied by Catherine de' Medici and her "*escadron volant*"—Impression made by this famous bevy of beauties upon the King of Navarre and the nobles of his Court—"All lovers together"—Return of Catherine and her squadron to Paris—Mlle. de Rebours—Mlle. de Fosseux, or "Fosseuse," maid-of-honour to the Queen of Navarre, attracts the favourable notice of the King—*Monsieur* likewise falls in love with the damsel—But is persuaded by Marguerite, anxious to placate her husband, "to subdue his passion"—Embarrassing results of the King of Navarre's admiration for "Fosseuse"—A Court scandal—Marguerite accepts an invitation from Henri III. to visit the Court of France, and takes "Fosseuse" with her—She is persuaded by the Queen and Catherine de' Medici to dismiss that lady from her service—Indignation of the King of Navarre against his wife in consequence of this proceeding—Revival of the old animosity between Henri III. and Marguerite—The King grossly and publicly insults his sister during a ball at the Louvre, and commands her to quit Paris and "deliver the Court from her contagious presence"—Near Palaiseau, he causes her and some of her attendants to be arrested and conveyed to Montargis, where he personally interrogates the latter in regard to the morals of their mistress—Refusal of her husband to receive her until a satisfactory explanation and apology is forthcoming from Henri III.—He finally consents, but Marguerite finds her position an unenviable one—Liaison of the King of Navarre with Corisande d'Andouins, Comtesse de Gramont, "*la belle* Corisande."

IF we are to believe all that contemporary chroniclers and historians tell us of the gallant adventures of Henri of Navarre, then it is necessary to admit that though several of his descendants, such as Louis XIV., Louis XV., the Regent Philippe d'Orléans and our own

Merry Monarch, acquired no small celebrity in this *métier*, they were, after all, but feeble imitators of their illustrious ancestor.[1]

The cares of State, the dangers and fatigues of war, never prevented him who has been named the Vert-Galant from paying court to the fair, and, like Vauvenargues's ideal critic, if he permitted himself preferences, he had no exclusions. High-born ladies and daughters of the people, abbesses and courtesans, maids, wives and widows, he made love to them all indiscriminately, nor would he appear to have entertained the least objection to having two or more affairs of the heart on his hands at the same time.

Despite the surveillance of his stern Huguenot preceptor, Florent Chrestien, Henri entered upon his career of gallantry at La Rochelle when he was barely fifteen. The object of this first attachment was a damsel named Florette or Fleurette, who would appear to have been the daughter of a gardener, and is said to have presented him with a son. It was also at La Rochelle that, after a brief interval, we hear of him laying successful siege to the heart of Suzanne des Moulins, wife of Pierre Mathieu, a professor at the University. This lady likewise presented him with a pledge of her affection, but the child—also a son—only lived a short time.[2]

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[1] Several historians, amongst whom may be mentioned Lescure ("Les Amours d'Henri IV.," Paris, 1864), Le Petit Homme Rouge (" The Favourites of Henry of Navarre," London, 1910), and M. L. Jarry ("Henriette d'Entragues," Orléans, 1897), have compiled lists of the *bonnes fortunes* of Henri IV., the number with which he is usually credited being about fifty, excluding certain ladies, such as Mlle. de Guise, Antoinette de Tours, Comtesse de Guercheville, and Catherine de Rohan, Duchesse des Deux-Ponts, whom he is believed to have courted without success. In the opinion, however, of so high an authority on the period as M. Charles Merki ("La Marquise de Verneuil et la mort d'Henri IV.," Paris, 1912), these lists, so far from being too lengthy, are probably very incomplete, "*car il avait eu partout des maîtresses et semé des enfants à tous les carrefours.*"

[2] Henri would appear to have been very partial to the wives of the professors at the University of La Rochelle, since some years later he engaged in a love-affair with the wife of another, one Pierre Martine, a learned Navarrais. This worthy man is said to have entertained so little suspicion of what was going on that he often boasted of the charms

Certain *passades* upon which we need not dwell here filled the interval between this affair and his marriage, in August 1572, with Marguerite de Valois, which was followed by the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, his forced conversion to the Roman Catholic religion, and three and a half years of semi-captivity at the Court of France. During this period the ill-assorted pair appear to have agreed upon a policy of reciprocal indulgence, and while Marguerite found consolation for the lack of her husband's affection in the society of La Môle, and when that gallant lost his head, in consequence of his participation in the Conspiracy of the *Politiques*,[1] in that of Bussy d'Amboise,[2] Henri, after various *amourettes*, conceived a violent passion for Charlotte de Beaune de Semblançay, Baronne de Sauve,[3] one of " those creatures more divine than human," who comprised Catherine de' Medici's renowned "*escadron volant*."[4] So great was his infatuation for Madame de Sauve, Marguerite tells us, in her " Mémoires," that he scarcely quitted her side all day, and did not seek the nuptial chamber until two hours after midnight.

This dangerous siren was at the same time courted by François de Valois, Duc d'Alençon—*Monsieur*, as he was officially styled—fourth son of Catherine

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of his spouse and of the attentions which the King paid her. Subsequently, we read of tender relations between his Majesty and a Madame de Sponde, the wife of a third professor, who translated Homer and Hesiod, while the lady deceived him with the King.

[1] See the author's " Queen Margot " (London, Harpers; New York, Scribners, 1906), pp. 181 *et seq*.

[2] Bussy, like La Môle and several other of Marguerite's admirers, came to a violent end, being assassinated at the Château of Coutancère, in Anjou, by a band of bravoes in the pay of the Comte de Montsoreau, with whose wife he was conducting an intrigue.

[3] She was the wife of Simon de Fizes, Baron de Sauve, Secretary of State under Charles IX. and Henri III. After the death of her first husband, in 1579, she married François de la Trémoille, Marquis de Noirmoutier. She retained her fascination until long past her first youth, and it was with her that Henri de Lorraine, Duc de Guise, spent his last night on earth, before falling under the daggers of the " Quarante-Cinq."

[4] Brantôme.

de' Medici, who was on the worst possible terms with his brother, Henri III. Acting doubtless on instructions from a high quarter, she employed all her wiles to incite that prince and the King of Navarre to jealousy of one another, and thus prevent any concerted action between them in the political arena, and succeeded but too well. " To such a pitch of violence," writes Marguerite, " did she work up the passion of my brother and my husband, that, forgetful of every other ambition, duty and object in life, the sole idea in their minds seemed to be the pursuit of this woman. Moreover, they thereby arrived at so great and furious a jealousy of one another, that, although she was sought by several others, who were all better beloved by her than they were, these two brothers-in-law paid no attention to this, but only dreaded each other's courtship."

The rivalry between the two princes was terminated by the flight of Alençon from the Court, and a few months later (February 4, 1576), the King of Navarre also contrived to effect his escape. It is related that after Henri had crossed the Seine at Poissy, and felt himself safe from pursuit, he remarked to his equerry Agrippe d'Aubigné and the other gentlemen who were with him :

" I have left in Paris only two things which I regret : the Mass and my wife. The first I will make shift to do without ; but the second I cannot, and I shall be glad to see her again."

It was not, however, until the autumn of 1578 that Marguerite was permitted to join him, and, in the interval, his Majesty would appear to have got on excellently well without his consort. To this epoch belongs his affair with Mlle. de Tignonville, daughter of Lancelot de Montceau, Seigneur de Tignonville, first *maître d'hôtel* to the King of Navarre. So enamoured did he become of this damsel, that he made the long journey to Béarn, under the pretext of seeing his sister Catherine, in order to pay court to her. At first Mlle. de Tignonville would have none of him, but he is believed to have triumphed over her resistance eventually, by the aid of a Gascon named Salbœuf, who, says d'Aubigné, "did not play the part of a gentleman in this matter."

Catherine accompanied her daughter to Gascony, ostensibly with the object of settling certain matters in dispute between the King of Navarre and Henri III., really in the hope of sowing dissension between the former and his most influential followers. For this purpose she decided to make use of those facile beauties whom she so often employed to seduce the chiefs of factions, to retain them in a voluptuous idleness, or to rob them of their secrets, and placed her "*escadron volant*" on its war-footing. In its ranks was Madame de Sauve, who, although she was but twenty-five, had achieved so many conquests that she must have seemed almost a veteran to the young girls who were on their first campaign, amongst whom may be mentioned Mlle. d'Atri, a fair Neapolitan, and Mlle. Dayelle,[1] a beautiful young Greek, who had escaped from the sack of Cyprus in 1571.

About the middle of December, the two Queens arrived at Nérac, the capital of Henri's duchy of Albret and the residence of his maternal ancestors, where it had been arranged that the conference between Catherine and the King of Navarre should be held. However, for the moment, politics were relegated to the background and love reigned supreme. The pretty girls whom Catherine had brought with her turned the heads of all the Protestant nobles, so much so indeed that the Queen-Mother suspected that the delay in holding the conference had been arranged by these enamoured gentlemen "to the end that they might the longer enjoy the society of her maids of honour." Even the stern Calvinist, d'Aubigné, and the grave statesman, Maximilien de Béthune, Baron de Rosny, afterwards Duc de Sully, caught the prevailing infection, for the former tells us that they were "all lovers together," while Sully admits that he also became a courtier and "took a mistress like the others." It should be mentioned, however, that the Calvinist nobles were, after all, only following the example of their sovereign, who was carrying on two love-affairs simultaneously, having renewed his old liaison with Madame de Sauve and started a new one with Mlle. Dayelle, the beautiful Cypriot, for whom his passion had reached a high temperature. "But," writes his complaisant consort, "this did not prevent the King, my husband, from showing me great respect and affection, as much, indeed, as I could have desired, . . . and he expressed great satisfaction at our reunion."[1]

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[1] Davila was her real name, and she was a sister of Horatio Davila, the historian, who was at this time one of the Gentlemen of the Chamber to François de Valois, now become Duc d'Anjou. She afterwards married a Norman gentleman named Jean d'Humières.

Much to Catherine's mortification, the charms of her fair auxiliaries did not succeed in making either Henri or his principal advisers lose sight of their political interests, and when, at the end of March 1579, she set out on her return to Paris, she had accomplished very little, save the sowing of a few seeds of discord about the King of Navarre, and the beguiling of two or three nobles from their allegiance to him.[2]

Madame de Sauve and the fascinating Mlle. Dayelle having followed Catherine to Paris, Henri turned for consolation to one of his wife's maids-of-honour, Mlle. de Rebours,[3] "a malicious girl," says Marguerite, "who disliked me and endeavoured by every means in her power to prejudice me in the eyes of the King my husband." Mlle. de Rebours's favour, however, was not of long duration, for when the Court quitted Pau for Nérac, in the following June, she was ill and had to be left behind, and by the time she was sufficiently recovered to regain it, her place in the King's affections had been usurped by another of Marguerite's maids-of-honour, Mlle. de Fosseux, or " Fosseuse," as the Queen had named her.[1] However, Fosseuse, a damsel of some fifteen summers, " conducted herself with virtue and propriety," and, for some time, the affair remained in its preliminary stages.

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[1] "Mémoires et lettres de Marguerite de Valois" (edit. Guessard).

[2] Among them was d'Ussac, the old governor of La Réole, one of the six surety-towns ceded to the Huguenots by the Peace of Bergerac. Mlle. d'Atri, Catherine's Neapolitan maid-of-honour, had contrived to render d'Ussac madly enamoured of her, and the King of Navarre and his younger nobles bantered the poor old man so unmercifully upon his infatuation, that he took offence and, in the next war, held La Réole against his former friends, "to the prejudice of his soul and his honour."

[3] Daughter of Guillaume de Rebours, a President of the Parlement of Paris, according to some writers, of Mont-Albert Rebours, a Huguenot gentleman, killed in the St. Bartholomew, according to others.

At the same time that he flirted with this *ingénue*, the Béarnais cast a favourable eye upon a soubrette in his wife's service called Xaintes, " *avec laquelle il familiarisait*." The Queen, however, was not in a position to protest, having a little affair of her own, with the handsome Vicomte de Turenne, afterwards Duc de Bouillon.

The renewal of the civil war temporarily interrupted his Majesty's courtship of Fosseuse, and when, after some months, the conclusion of peace gave him leisure to resume it, he found, to his mortification, that he no longer had the field to himself. The Duc d'Anjou[2] had been sent to Gascony to treat for peace on behalf of Henri III. and, after his diplomatic labours were over, he remained as a guest at his brother-in-law's court. *Monsieur*, who had a marvellous aptitude for making mischief wherever he went, did not fail to maintain his reputation in this respect. He fell in love with the fair Fosseuse, and, for a time, there reigned between him and his royal host a rivalry almost as bitter as had existed in the days when they were both at the feet of Madame de Sauve. Nor was this all; for the King conceived the idea that his consort, through jealousy of Fosseuse, was favouring her brother's equivocal attentions to the damsel, and began to treat her with marked coldness. To remedy this painful state of affairs, the Queen was forced to intervene and secure to Henri the peaceable possession of his enchantress, " by pointing out to her brother the misery he would bring upon her by this courtship," whereupon that magnanimous prince, " caring, as he did, more for her happiness than his own, subdued his passion."[1]

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[1] Françoise de Montmorency, fifth daughter of Pierre de Montmorency, Marquis de Thury, Baron de Fosseux.

[2] Alençon had become Duc d'Anjou in 1576.

Marguerite, however, soon had reason to regret that *Monsieur* had proved so complaisant, since Mlle. Fosseuse, who had hitherto only allowed the King " such familiarities as might with all propriety be permitted," ended, as might have been foreseen, " by surrendering herself entirely to his will," with results of a very embarrassing nature. " Whereupon," continues the Queen, " finding herself in this condition, her bearing towards me changed, and instead of being frank with me, as was her custom, and rendering me all the good service in her power with respect to the King my husband, she began avoiding me, and rendering me as many evil turns as she had formerly done me good ones. She possessed so much influence over the King that, in a very short while, I perceived that he was wholly changed. He became estranged, avoided me, and no longer took the same pleasure in my society as when Fosseuse had conducted herself with propriety."

Soon the damsel's condition was the chief topic of conversation, not only at the Court, but in all the country round. The Queen, anxious to put a stop to the scandal, summoned her to her cabinet, and proposed that, under pretext of avoiding the plague which had broken out at Nérac, she (the Queen) should retire to Mas d'Agenais, a country house belonging to the King, situated in a very lonely spot, taking Fosseuse and such persons as could be trusted to hold their tongues with her, and remain there until a certain event had taken place. Thus, they would put an end to a scandal which concerned the Queen no less than her maid-of-honour.

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[1] "Mémoires et lettres de Marguerite de Valois " (edit. Guessard). The Queen had certainly need to placate her husband at this period, since she had fallen desperately in love with *Monsieur's* grand equerry, Jacques de Harlay, Seigneur de Chanvallon, one of the handsomest men of his time, and had acted with such singular indiscretion that the affair was the talk of the Court, and it was even reported that her Majesty and M. de Chanvallon had been detected in a most compromising situation. After her gallant returned with his master to Paris, we find the enamoured princess writing to him in the following strain : " Absence, constraint, serves but to increase my love, as much as it would diminish that of a feeble soul inflamed by a vulgar passion. . . . Be sure that the hour when you change will be that of my end. . . . I live no more save in you, *mon beau tout, ma seule et parfaite beauté*. . . . I kiss a million times those beautiful eyes, that beautiful hair, my dear and sweet fetters ; I kiss a million times that beautiful and lovable mouth," and so forth.

Instead of being grateful for her Majesty's magnanimity, Fosseuse answered, with a fine assumption of injured innocence, that she would give the lie to all who spoke ill of her, and accused Marguerite of seeking a pretext to compass her ruin. Then she left the Queen's cabinet in a rage and went to inform the King of what had passed. Henri was no less incensed than his mistress, declared that she had been shamefully maligned and did not fail to show Marguerite how much he resented her interference.

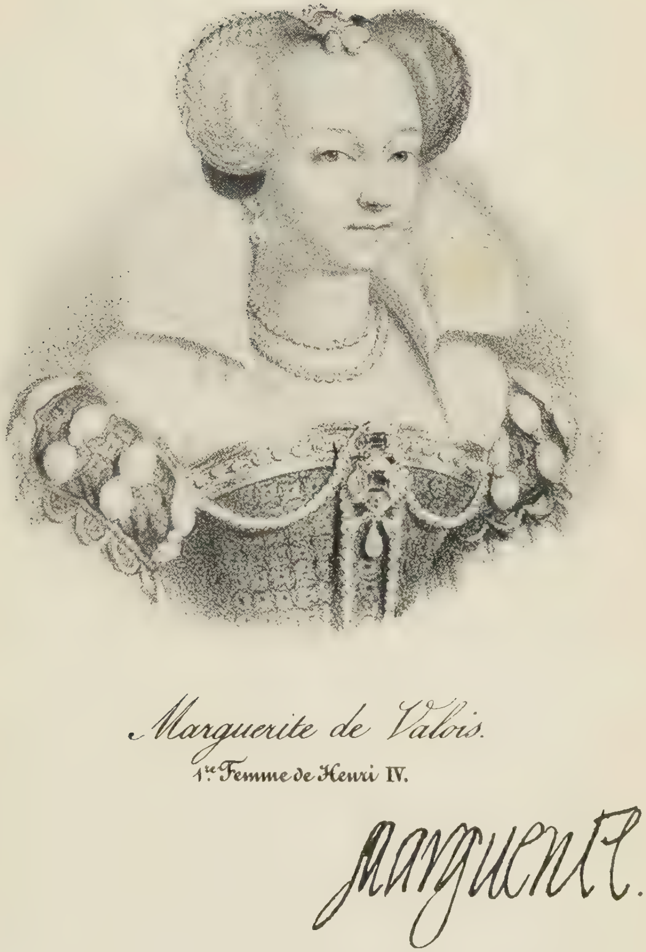
However, one night, some three or four months later, there came a doctor knocking at the door of the royal bed-chamber, with tidings of a very urgent nature for his Majesty's ear alone. "My husband," writes Marguerite, "was greatly embarrassed as to what he should do, fearing, on the one hand, that she (Fosseuse) might be discovered, and, on the other, that she might not receive proper attention, for he loved her dearly. Finally, he decided to confess everything to me, being assured, notwithstanding what had happened in the past, that he would always find me ready to serve him. He thereupon drew aside my bed-curtains and said to me: '*M'amie*, I have concealed something from you that I must now avow. I entreat you to pardon me, and not to bear in mind what I have said to you on the matter; but to oblige me by rising at once and going to the assistance of Fosseuse, who is very ill. I feel assured that, seeing her in this state, you will not harbour resentment for what has passed. You know how much I love her; I entreat you, therefore, to do me this favour.' "

The Queen replied that, " she honoured him too much to take anything amiss that he proposed," and that she would hasten to Fosseuse and " behave to her as though she were her own daughter." At the same time, she advised her husband to go away on a hunting expedition, so as to minimize the danger of the affair getting about.

Marguerite kept her word, and " God willed that Fosseuse should give birth to a daughter, who, moreover, was still-born." If a son had been born and had survived, who could have foreseen the unpleasant consequences that might have ensued, since it would appear that Henri, in accordance with the practice he adopted with several later enchantresses, had promised the lady that, if she bore him a son, he would repudiate his consort and marry her? But, " in spite of employing the greatest discretion," the news of the event was soon all over the château, and when the King returned from the chase, he begged Marguerite to pay a second visit to Fosseuse, thinking by this means to silence the rumours which were afloat.

Her Majesty, however, not unnaturally considering that, in consenting to act the part of a mother to her husband's mistress, she had carried her complacency far enough for one day, declined. " I replied," she writes, " that I had visited her when she had need of my assistance; but that now she no longer required it, and that if I went to her, I should be revealing rather than concealing what had occurred, and that everyone would point the finger of scorn at me. He was extremely angry with me, which displeased me greatly, since I did not consider that, after what I had done in the morning, I deserved such a reward." And the Queen adds: " She (Fosseuse) often incited him to get into these tempers against me."

In January 1582, Marguerite left Nérac, on a visit to the Court of France, and, to Henri's great distress,


Marguerite de Valois.
1re Femme de Henri IV.
Marguerite.

Marguerite de Valois, Queen of Navarre.
From a contemporary print.

[*To face p.* 10.

took Fosseuse with her. Shortly after her arrival in Paris, yielding to the urgent representations of Catherine and of the pious Queen, Louise of Lorraine, the latter of whom was inexpressibly shocked at seeing a lady of such unenviable notoriety in attendance upon her sister-in-law, she dismissed that errant damsel from her service, although, by way of compensation, she subsequently arranged for her a very advantageous marriage, with François de Broc, Baron de Cinq-Mars. The King of Navarre, on learning that his inamorata had received her *congé*, was highly indignant and despatched one of his gentlemen to his wife to acquaint her with his displeasure. Marguerite replied in a very admirable letter, which ought to have convinced the infatuated monarch that he had gone too far and drawn an apology from him. But, unfortunately, Catherine took upon herself to interfere and wrote her son-in-law a sharp reprimand, which deeply offended him and incensed him still further against his wife.

Marguerite's visit to the French Court, the chief object of which appears to have been the resumption of her interrupted romance with *le beau* Chanvallon, proved a most fatal step, so far as she was concerned. For many years past the princess and her elder brother, Henri III., had been on the worst possible terms, and, after a brief truce, the old animosity between them revived and became more bitter than ever. Finally, on August 8, 1583, the King grossly and publicly insulted his sister during a ball at the Louvre, upbraiding her with her amours with Chanvallon, by whom he accused her of having had a child, and enumerating all the lovers whom she had had since her marriage, "naming so precisely dates and places," writes the Austrian Ambassador, Busbecq, "that he seemed to have been a witness of the incidents of which he spoke."[1] Then, without giving the unfortunate princess time to reply, he commanded her to quit Paris and " deliver the Court from her contagious presence."

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[1] The King had suborned one of Marguerite's waiting-women, who furnished his Majesty with a full, true and particular account of the Chanvallon affair, together with many piquant details concerning his predecessors in her mistress's affections.

Marguerite obeyed, and next morning left Paris, with the intention of proceeding to the Château of Vendôme, which belonged to Henri of Navarre, and remaining there until she had ascertained what kind of reception she was likely to meet with at Nérac, since she could not doubt that the news of the scene at the Louvre would very soon reach her husband's ears. But the malevolence of Henri III. was not yet satisfied, and near Palaiseau he caused the Queen and some of her attendants to be arrested and conveyed to the Château of Montargis, where he personally interrogated the latter in regard to the morals of their mistress, his object being to ascertain what truth there was in the report which he had affected to believe that his sister had secretly given birth to a child by Chanvallon,[1] with the connivance of her confidantes, Mesdames de Béthune and de Duras. To the King's intense mortification, however, the two ladies in question persisted in denying the accusation, and neither threats nor cajolery could wring anything from them to incriminate the Queen. The evidence of Marguerite's other attendants proved equally unsatisfactory, from his Majesty's point of view, and there can be little doubt that the charge was a malicious slander, started and propagated by the princess's enemies.[2]

On the intercession of the Queen-Mother, who was

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[1] The previous evening, Henri III. had sent to arrest Chanvallon, but that gentleman, warned in time, had prudently taken to flight.

[2] " The Queen was innocent of that which was imputed to her," remarks Brantôme, " as I happen to know." On the other hand, Dupleix declares that Marguerite gave birth to a son by Chanvallon. " He is still living," continues the historian ; " he is a Capuchin called Frère Ange ; I was formerly acquainted with him " (" Histoire d'Henri IV.," p. 595). Apart from the fact that Dupleix is quite unworthy of belief where Marguerite is concerned, M. de Saint-Poncy points out in his " Histoire de Marguerite de Valois," that this Frère Ange must have been born some years before the intrigue with Chanvallon began, since in 1603 he was a full-fledged monk and confessor to Henriette d'Entragues, Henri IV.'s mistress.

"beside herself with affliction" on learning of the indignity to which her daughter had been subjected, Henri III. liberated the prisoners and permitted Marguerite to continue her journey, having first insisted that she should dismiss Mesdames de Béthune and de Duras from her service. However, on her arrival at Cognac, she received a letter from her husband, forbidding her to enter his dominions, until a full and satisfactory explanation had been accorded him by Henri III. If, he declared, the charges made against her were true, she was not fit to be his wife; if they were false, her honour required that her brother should withdraw them, and apologize for calumnies so atrocious, for an insult so humiliating. The brave and accomplished Du Plessis-Mornay, the "Pope of the Huguenots," as the Catholics called him, and, subsequently, the bluff d'Aubigné were despatched to Henri III. to remonstrate with him on the want of consideration he had shown for their master's honour. But they could get nothing from him but a kind of half-apology, and in October he despatched Pomponne de Bellièvre, afterwards Chancellor, to Nérac, with a letter wherein he imperiously commanded his brother-in-law to receive his wife immediately, and declared that he had no satisfaction to give him, since it was his King's privilege to act as he pleased towards his subjects.[1]

This the King of Navarre declined to do, and the dispute dragged on until the beginning of the following spring, when the condition of *Monsieur*, who was slowly dying of consumption at Château-Thierry, and whose death would leave Henri of Navarre heir-presumptive to the French throne, contributed to bring about a settlement. Henri III. desired a reconciliation with his brother-in-law, hoping to prevail upon him to embrace the Catholic faith again, and thus avert the trouble which must inevitably follow the death of Anjou. "I recognize your master as my sole heir," said he to Mornay, who had been sent on a second embassy to the Court of France. "He is a prince of exalted birth and great parts. I have always loved him, and I know that he loves me. He is somewhat choleric and brusque; but good at bottom." Mornay lost no time in informing his master of the King's words, and urged him strongly to be reconciled to his wife.[1] His wise counsel prevailed, and, at the beginning of April, Marguerite, who had been residing at Agen, one of the towns of her appanage, received an intimation from her husband that he was prepared to receive her.

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[1] At the same time, he begged him not to take the matter so much to heart. "Kings," he wrote, "are often liable to be deceived by false reports, and calumny has not always respected the conduct and morals of even the most virtuous princesses, as, for example, the Queen your mother. You cannot be ignorant of all the evil that was said of her." "His Majesty," remarked the Béarnais ironically to Bellièvre, "does me too much honour; he tells me I am the son of a wanton, by way of excuse for calling my wife one."

The Queen of Navarre accordingly returned to Nérac and nominally resumed her former position, but she did not find there the same consideration nor the same security as she had once enjoyed. Henri, careless and good-natured though he might be where morality was concerned, had been deeply incensed by the odious scandal which had assailed his wife's reputation, by the pressure which had been brought to bear upon him to reinstate her under the conjugal roof, and by the threats to which his resistance had provoked the French Court. And, even if all this had never occurred, it is probable that His Majesty would have been by no means anxious for Marguerite's return, as he was now desperately enamoured of Diane d'Andouins, Comtesse de Gramont, known to history as "*la belle* Corisande," who had gained so great an ascendency over him that she was commonly reported to have bewitched him.

Madame de Gramont, who was a year or two older than her royal lover, was a very different kind of woman from the frail beauties who had hitherto engaged Henri's attentions. In the first place, she was very wealthy, being the only child of Paul d'Andouins, Vicomte de Louvigny, Seigneur de Lescar, one of the four great baronies of Béarn, and the widow of Philibert, Comte de Gramont, the favourite of Henri III., who was mortally wounded at the siege of La Fère in August 1580; and her affection for the young king was quite disinterested. In the second, she was a woman of considerable intellectual attainments[1] and a most accomplished musician, and in 1573 had given proof of a courage and *sang-froid* very unusual in one of her sex, when she had saved the life of her father-in-law, attacked at the Château of Hagetmau, near Pau, by a band of Protestant rebels, led by the Baron d'Arras. Lastly, though she passed several years of her married life amidst the corrupting atmosphere of the dissolute Court of the Valois, where vice was the mode, and virtue, even ordinary decency, was mocked and derided, she has the great honour not to figure in the scandals to which the chroniclers of the time devote so many pages.

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[1] Adding some very excellent advice for his Majesty's future conduct. "The love-affairs," he writes, "which are carried on so openly, and to which you devote so much time, are no longer seasonable. It is time, Sire, for you to make love to all Christendom, and especially to France."

It was not, indeed, until after the death of her husband, when she was living at the Château of Hagetmau, that her liaison with the King of Navarre, whom she had known since the time when they were children,[2] began. The date is uncertain, but it was probably shortly after the departure of Marguerite and the fair Fosseuse for Paris in January 1582, though some historians place it at the end of 1580. Anyway, Madame de Gramont inspired in the volatile heart of the Béarnais the love the most worthy, as well as the most durable, which he had yet experienced; he gave her his fullest confidence and treated her with almost as much respect as he would have shown to a queen.

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[1] She was an intimate friend of Montaigne, who, in 1580, at the time of the first issue of his "Essais," dedicated to her a chapter containing twenty-nine of the sonnets of his dead friend, the poet La Boëtie.

[2] She had shared the studies of Henri and his sister, Catherine de Bourbon, afterwards Duchess of Bar.

CHAPTER II

The death of the Duc d'Anjou makes Henri of Navarre heir presumptive to the throne of France—Treaty of Nemours—Bull of Sixtus V. against the King of Navarre—Renewal of the civil war—Strained relations between the King and Queen of Navarre—Marguerite leaves Nérac and takes refuge at Agen, one of the towns of her appanage—Devotion of the Comtesse de Gramont to the King of Navarre—Her sacrifices on his behalf—Henri contemplates obtaining a divorce from his consort and marrying his mistress—His letters to her one of the most valuable sources for a study of his character—Mlle. de Boyslambert—Scandalous conduct of the King of Navarre with her at La Rochelle—He is compelled by the Calvinist pastors to make public reparation for his sins before the Battle of Coutras—After the victory, he hastens away to Gascony to lay the captured standards at the feet of *la belle* Corisande—Henri's overtures rejected by the Comtesse de Guercheville and the Duchesse des Deux-Ponts—His love-affair with Claude de Beauvilliers, Abbess of Montmartre—Rupture of the relations between the King of Navarre and Madame de Gramont—Last years of the countess—First meeting of Henri and Gabrielle d'Estrées—Visit of Gabrielle to the Royal camp before Chartres—Her marriage with M. de Liencourt—She leaves him and rejoins the King—Her marriage annulled—Her children by Henri IV.—Deep attachment of the King to her—Her beauty and amiable character—Henri determines to marry her, so soon as he can obtain the dissolution of his marriage with Marguerite de Valois—Universal alarm caused by this resolution—Sudden death of Gabrielle—Extravagant grief of the King—Negotiations opened for Henri's marriage with Marie de' Medici—The King's marriage with Queen Marguerite is dissolved by Clement VIII.

THE death of the Duc d'Anjou, in June 1584, opened to Henri of Navarre the prospect of the throne of France, but the fact that the legitimate heir was a heretic made the renewal of the civil war inevitable, and the Guises and the League at once began to organize their forces for the coming struggle. No means were left untried by them to intimidate Henri III. into giving their proceedings his countenance and support, and, though for a time the King declined to yield, he eventually gave way and, on July 1585, signed the Treaty of Nemours, whereby he interdicted throughout his realm any other religion save the Catholic, on pain of death, and bound himself to declare war on all Huguenots who at the expiration of six months had not made their submission. In September, appeared the Bull in which Sixtus V. declared " Henri, *formerly* King of Navarre," a relapsed heretic and proclaimed him incapable of succeeding to the throne of France, and at the beginning of the following year war began.

While these momentous events were taking place, the position of the Queen of Navarre at Nérac was becoming increasingly difficult. So long as his wife had been of use to him in his political schemes, Henri had shown her at least those outward marks of respect and consideration to which her rank entitled her. But now she had lost her credit and could no longer serve as an intermediary between him and the French Court; nay, more, he had come to regard her in the light of a possible rival, for there was a party in the nation which, too orthodox to accept a heretic sovereign, and, on the other hand, too fervently Royalist to desire a change of dynasty, meditated, in the event of Henri III.'s death, putting Marguerite forward as a claimant to the throne, in defiance of the Salic Law. In consequence, Henri began to neglect her entirely, passing nearly all his time at Pau with the Comtesse de Gramont and paying only brief and infrequent visits to Nérac. *La belle* Corisande, too, seems to have lost no opportunity of sowing dissension between the royal pair, and the breach grew daily wider.

At length, matters came to such a pass that each party believed, or affected to believe, that the other cherished the most sinister designs and was only waiting to put them into execution. Marguerite imagined that she had everything to fear from the ascendency of the Comtesse de Gramont, and declared that there was a plot to carry her off and retain her captive at Pau. On his side, Henri caused a man named Ferrand, who was, or had been until very recently, one of the Queen's secretaries, to be arrested on a charge of attempting to poison him,[1] though it subsequently transpired that he had done nothing worse than carry on a very active propaganda on behalf of the Guises. Nevertheless, before his innocence of the criminal charge was established, Henri, spurred on by Madame de Gramont, seems to have contemplated very seriously repudiating his wife, on the ground that she had been an accomplice of Ferrand, and took the advice of his Council on the matter.

An open rupture between the ill-assorted couple was now inevitable, and Marguerite determined to quit Nérac and seek an asylum on the estates of her appanage, which bordered on the dominions of the King of Navarre. It was her intention to maintain herself there, with the support of the League, as a kind of independent sovereign, and set both her husband and brother at defiance. Accordingly, about the middle of March, she proceeded to Agen, on the pretext of desiring to be edified by the discourses of an eloquent monk who was to preach there during Holy Week, and embarked upon that series of strange adventures[2] which brought her eventually to the mountain fortress of Usson, where she spent nearly twenty years and wrote the famous "Mémoires," "by reason of which an enduring radiance will attach to her name."[3]

If Madame de Gramont's conduct in seeking to embitter the relations between the King of Navarre and his consort reflects but little credit upon her, the part she played during the eventful years which followed the renewal of the civil war is deserving of all admiration. She stimulated her royal lover's ambition and shared his councils; she mortgaged her immense estates and pledged her jewels to provide him with the money which he so sorely needed to maintain the unequal struggle against the forces of Henri III. and the League, and, not content with this proof of her devotion, undertook long and fatiguing journeys on his behalf, traversing the mountains of Béarn and the valleys of Gascony in order to recruit troops for his service.[1]

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[1] An attempt to poison Henri had certainly been made about this time. Under date March 6, 1585, the Austrian Ambassador, Busbecq, writes to his Court: "A villain has endeavoured to poison the King of Navarre, but either because the poison was not sufficiently virulent, or because the prince's constitution was too strong, the venom did not take effect. The wretch attempted to kill himself with a pistol."

[2] See the author's "Queen Margot," pp. 314 *et seq.*

[3] Sainte-Beuve.

Henri was always anxious to marry his mistress for the time being, "a proof," remarks one of his biographers, "that the reiterated and passionate protestations of constancy in which his letters abound were not wholly insincere,"[2] and about the end of 1587 or the beginning of 1588 he conceived the idea of espousing his Corisande. D'Aubigné tells us that one day his master charged him on his allegiance to give him good advice, and then, after citing thirty instances of princes who had married subjects, told him that he had promised his hand to the Comtesse de Gramont, in case he should, as he hoped, succeed in obtaining a divorce from Queen Marguerite. It is probable that, at the time this promise was given, Madame de Gramont was enceinte, since it is known that she bore the King a son, who died in 1590, as is indicated by one of Henri's letters to her, in which he says: "I am greatly distressed by the death of my little one (*petiot*); he was beginning to talk."

If we may believe d'Aubigné, he reminded the King that the position of the princes he had mentioned had been very different from his own, engaged as he was in a life-and-death struggle for his rights and his religion, and that those who followed him, as Protector of the Churches, expected from him zeal, noble actions and virtues. Finally, after considerable difficulty, he succeeded in extracting from him a solemn promise to postpone his project in regard to Madame de Gramont for two years. When that period expired, Henri's passion for Corisande was expiring also.

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[1] "This lady," says the author of "Les Amours du Grand Alcandre," "made war on his behalf at her own expense and sent him levies of 23,000 or 24,000 Gascons." The author probably exaggerates the numbers of troops which Madame de Gramont recruited for the King of Navarre, but they were no doubt considerable.

[2] Mr. P. F. Willert: "Henry of Navarre and the Huguenots in France."

From the beginning of the war down to the termination of his relations with Madame de Gramont in 1590, Henri appears to have maintained with his mistress a regular correspondence. None of the lady's letters has been preserved, but, happily, a good many of the King's are in existence,[1] since they are undoubtedly amongst the most interesting which he ever penned, and one of the most valuable sources for an intimate study of this remarkable personality. "It is from these letters, unconstrained, natural, sincere, familiar and jovial," writes Lescure, "that we are able to trace one by one the traits of the physiognomy, political, moral, gallant, of Henri IV. To his other mistresses, Henri IV. said only what he wished. To Corisande, whom he feels to be entirely his own, he tells everything."[2]

Often he writes to her of military matters and, so to speak, associates her in his enterprises.

"The enemy took the Île de Marans before my arrival, so that I could not relieve the château," he writes under date March 12, 1587. "You will soon hear that I have retaken it, please God."

And again:

"Yesterday, the Marshal (de Matignon) and the Grand Prior came and offered us battle, being well aware that I had sent my troops back. It occurred on the summit of the vineyards near Agen. They were five hundred horse and nearly three thousand foot.

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[1] Thirty-seven of the letters addressed by Henri IV. to Madame de Gramont were collected by the Comte d'Argenson, Minister for War under Louis XV., and at his death, in 1764, became the property of Président Hénault. The latter communicated them to La Place, by whom they were published in the *Mercure*, 1765-66. Other letters in the same correspondence came to light at various times, and the whole collection, so far as it goes, will be found in Bergui de Xivrey's "Recueil des Lettres missives d'Henri IV.," published in the collection of "Documents relatifs à l'histoire de France." The original letters are in the Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal.

[2] "Les Amours d'Henri IV." (Paris, 1864).

After spending five hours in forming their order of battle, which was somewhat confused, they advanced, resolved to hurl us into the moats of the town, as they assuredly ought to have done, since all their infantry came into action. We received them at the wall of my vineyard, which was the furthest, and retreated at a walk, skirmishing continually, until we were only five hundred paces from the town, where lay our main force, which may have numbered three hundred arquebusiers. Then we drove them back to the point where they had assailed us. It was the hottest skirmish I have seen."[1]

At another time he addresses her in the style of a knight of the age of chivalry:

"Prepare yourself, my beautiful mistress, to have a favour made for me; for I will wear none save your favours in this war. I have only two hundred horse to oppose to their three hundred, but I will see if the others will fight. If they do so, I will fire a pistol-shot for love of you."

It is to Madame de Gramont, who loves him for himself, that Henri confides the most readily his maladies, his perplexities, his disappointments:

"Yerre could not be sent off on account of my illness, from which, thank God, I now see myself emerging. Assuredly, my heart, I saw the heavens open, but I was not deemed worthy to enter them. God still desires to make use of me. Twice in twenty-four hours I was brought so low as to be fit to be wrapped in shrouds. You would have pitied me. . . . I conclude because I feel faint. Good-morrow, my soul."

"My mind is sorely disturbed, and not without reason. Send Licerac to me; I will send you word by him of the extreme afflictions in which I find myself. I know not how I am able to support them."

The sudden death of his cousin, Henri I. de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, at Saint-Jean-d'Angély, at the beginning of March 1588, in circumstances which pointed most strongly to poison, following as it did upon the crushing defeat of the German auxiliaries, from whose assistance he had expected so much, was a great blow to the King of Navarre. "Ah!" cries he to Corisande, "the violent trials by which I am assailed are racking my brain. This year will be my touchstone. I must assuredly either become mad or turn out a clever man."

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[1] Letter of March 12, 1587.

He had a strong suspicion that an attempt might be made on his own life and tells his mistress of it:

"I am now the only target of the perfidies of the Mass (worshippers). They poisoned him (Condé), the traitors. But my God remains the master, and I, by His grace, the executor of His will. . . . I foresee that great trouble is coming upon me. Pray stoutly to God for me. Should I escape, it will be that He will have preserved me. Until the grave, to which I am perchance nearer than I imagine, I shall remain your faithful slave. . . . My soul, I am well enough in body, but sorely afflicted in mind. Love me and show me that you do so; it will be a great consolation to me."[1]

Henri's letters are, of course, full of the extravagant expressions of tenderness which were then the mode.[2]

"Your slave loves you to distraction. . . . I kiss thy hand a million times. . . . Love me more than yourself. . . . I would rather die than fail in aught that I have promised you," and so forth.

As for his protestations of constancy, they are innumerable:

"My heart, always remember Petiot (little one). Assuredly his fidelity is a miracle. . . . Believe that my fidelity is white and spotless; its like was never seen. . . . Live assured of my fidelity; it grows firmer, if that be possible. . . . Be always assured of my fidelity, which will be inviolable. . . . I love none but you, and in that resolution I shall die. . . . Never entertain a doubt of my fidelity. . . . Be assured of your slave's fidelity. He will never fail you. . . . Believe that nothing save a departure from friendship (on your part) will ever cause me to alter my resolution to be yours eternally."

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[1] Letters of March 10 and 13, 1588.

[2] "Our style to-day is full of excess," writes the Queen of Navarre's chancellor, Pibrac, to his mistress in 1581. "People no longer make use of the words 'to love' and 'to serve.' They add to them 'extremely,' 'passionately,' 'madly,' and other similar expressions, even so far as to invest with divinity things which are less than human."

Alas! Henri's fidelity to Corisande was very far from being so "white and spotless" as he asserted. During the years of their liaison the names of quite a number of women are associated with his. His affair with the wife of the learned and unsuspecting Pierre Martine, of La Rochelle, belongs to this period,[1] and about the same time his Majesty gained the favour of a certain Mlle. Esther de Boyslambert, of that town, who, in August 1587, presented him with a son.[2] Henri lived quite openly with this lady in the Hôtel d'Huré, Rue de Bazoges, at La Rochelle, to the great scandal of the Calvinist pastors, who exhorted him from the pulpit to amend the irregularities of his life. Their admonitions were for a time unheeded, but the indignant ministers took advantage of the King's entry upon the campaign of Coutras to compel him to make public confession of his faults in the Protestant temple of Pons, in the presence of all his captains.[3] The battle of

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[1] See page 2 *supra.*

[2] The little boy, who was called Gideon, died two years later.

[3] But, according to certain writers whom M. Merki cites, this confession took place on the battlefield of Coutras. Péréfixe, in his "Vie d'Henri IV.," relates that at the moment when the King was about to sound the charge, a minister stopped him, declaring that God would not bless his arms until he had repaired the scandal he had occasioned by seducing a young girl belonging to an honourable family of La Rochelle. The "Dictionnaire des Sièges et Batailles," under the word "Coutras," adds that, having ranged his troops in order of battle, Henri of Navarre, "recognizing his sin, threw himself on his knees and asked pardon of God, promising to repair the honour of the outraged family and taking to witness all those who saw and heard him." "All those present shed tears," says of the same the "Notice sur la Vie d'Henri le Grand," "and would have given a thousand lives for a prince so good and who recognized thus his faults."—M. Charles Merki, "La Marquise de Verneuil et la mort d'Henri IV."

Coutras took place some days later, and they were able to attribute the defeat of the Catholics to the repentance which Henri had manifested. But the incorrigible Béarnais, instead of pursuing his advantage, hurried southwards on the wings of love to lay the captured standards at the feet of *la belle* Corisande.[1] Neither did he break with Mlle. de Boyslambert, who followed him in more than one of his campaigns, and was subsequently accused by Gabrielle d'Estrées of having attempted to poison her.[2]

Meantime, Henri had courted Antoinette de Pons, Comtesse de Guercheville, a very pretty young widow, who made him forget, for the moment at any rate, his other conquests. So enamoured did he become that, according to Mlle. de Guise, " he spoke of marriage to the countess, since she was unwilling to listen to him otherwise."[3] However, the lady is believed to have declined to yield to the solicitations of the monarch, and the latter experienced a similar rebuff at the hands of Catherine de Rohan, Duchesse des Deux-Ponts, who informed him that " she was too poor to be his wife and of too good a family to be his mistress."

At the time of the blockade of Paris by Henry IV., the Huguenots placed their cannon on the ruins of the old temple of Mars, at Montmartre, near which stood the abbey of that name, whose church is still in existence. The King and his officers hastened to appropriate the nuns, according to the custom of the epoch, and "abandoned themselves to the worst disorders with them."[1] To his Majesty was adjudged the abbess, Claude, or Claudine, de Beauvilliers,[2] who was at this time only seventeen, and so frequent were the King's visits to the abbey that, in after years, "he was accustomed to speak of it as his own monastery and to say that he had been a monk there." After a time, however, he removed Claude de Beauvilliers to a pavilion in the Bois de Bondy, which he had had built for her, and when the advance of the Spaniards from the Netherlands obliged him to raise the siege, had her conducted to Senlis. After a few months, however, he wearied of Claude, as he had wearied of so many others, and she returned to Montmartre, but a year or two later Henri provided her with the rich Abbey of the Pont-aux-Dames, near Meaux.

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[1] It is, however, very doubtful whether Henri could have effected anything of importance, even if he had remained with his troops. In a despatch to Elizabeth of England, he explains his inaction after Coutras on the ground that he could not keep his army together, so eager were the soldiers to secure and carry home their booty ; adding that a large part of his forces consisted of the levies of the districts in the immediate neighbourhood, Poitou, Saintonge and the Angoumois, who had come prepared to fight a battle, but not equipped for a campaign.

[2] If we may believe L'Estoile, Henri treated this poor lady very shabbily. " At the end of this year (1592)," he writes, " a woman called Madame Esther, who had been one of the mistresses of the King at La Rochelle, pressed by necessity and seeing herself, owing to the death of her son, cast off and almost abandoned by his Majesty, came to seek him at Saint-Denis, to implore him to have pity upon her. But the King, hindered by other affairs, and having also his mind occupied by other amours, took no account of her and refused either to see or to hear her. Upon which this poor creature, overwhelmed by sorrow and mortification, fell ill at the said Saint-Denis and died."

[3] " Les Amours du Grand Alcandre."

Madame de Gramont was far too well informed of Henri's little affairs to be the dupe of his protestations of constancy, and on one of his Majesty's letters, dated May 15, 1589, she indicates her opinion of their value pretty plainly. "Swearing truly to you," writes the King, "that I love and honour none in the world as I do you, and that I will keep faithful (*garderoi fidelité*) to you even to the grave." Whereupon the lady writes:

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[1] They had acted in the same way at the Abbey of Maubuisson, where the King lodged during the siege of Pontoise, and the chroniclers of the time report many scandalous details, which it would be impossible to reproduce.

[2] She was a daughter of Claude de Beauvilliers, Comte de Saint-Aignan, and Marie Babou de la Bourdaisière, and Lescure and other historians have confused her with her sister Marie de Beauvilliers, who became Abbess of Montmartre in 1598. Marie, a very different woman from her sister, addressed herself to the task of putting an end to the disorders which had existed in the convent since its invasion by Henry IV. and his officers at the time of the blockade of Paris, expelling the most depraved of the nuns and bringing the rest under strict discipline. In revenge, some of the latter made an attempt to poison the abbess, which very nearly succeeded.

"*Il n'y a rien qui n'y paroisse*" (There is no appearance of it), and after changing "*fidelité*" into "*INfidelité,*" adds sarcastically: "*Je le crois*" (I believe it).

Nor would she appear always to have kept her knowledge or her suspicions to herself, for on one occasion we find the King writing to her as follows:

"I have received a letter from you, my mistress, by which you acquaint me that you do not wish me ill, but that you are unable to place reliance in one so variable as myself. I am displeased beyond measure to learn the first, and you are quite wrong to continue doubting as you do. In what actions of mine have you known me to be variable, I say, as regards yourself? I have always remained firm in the love and service I vowed to you. God is my witness of it."

The correspondence continues throughout that eventful year 1589, which witnessed the reconciliation of the King of Navarre with Henri III., the advance of their united forces upon Paris, the assassination of Henri III. by Jacques Clément, which made the Béarnais King of France *de jure,* if not *de facto*, and the latter's campaign in Normandy, and not the least interesting of Henri's letters to Corisande is the one which he addressed to her from his fortified camp at Arques, on September 7th, a fortnight before the battle of that name:

"I am so hard worked, but I contrive to keep well, and my affairs prosper better than some folk expected. I have taken Eu. The enemy, who are now double my strength, thought they would take me. After accomplishing my enterprise, I drew near to Dieppe[1] and await them in a camp which I am fortifying. To-morrow I shall see them, and I hope, with God's help, that, if they attack me, they will find that they have made an ill bargain of it."[2]

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[1] Arques lies some five miles from Dieppe.

[2] The army of the League, under Mayenne, appeared in front of the Royal lines on September 13th. There was some sharp fighting on the 13th, but the decisive attack was not delivered until the early morning of the 21st. The issue was for some time in doubt, but eventually the Leaguers were repulsed.

But the following year saw the end of the liaison, which had already lasted far beyond the span of any in which the fickle prince had yet engaged, and of which he had for some time past been growing weary. For *la belle* Corisande was beautiful no longer; she was now thirty-seven, and the years do not appear to have dealt at all kindly with her; anyway, she had lost the power to charm him which she had once possessed.

The death of their little son severed what was probably the last link which bound Henri to her. Disembarrassed of the scruples of the father, he very soon triumphed over those of the lover, and the part played by Madame de Gramont in the love-affair of Catherine de Bourbon and the Comte de Soissons[1] hastened what was now inevitable.

In 1587, Henri had adroitly detached Soissons from the party of the League, by encouraging him to hope for the hand of his sister Catherine. The match was a brilliant one for a poorly endowed younger son, and the count was undoubtedly attached to the princess, who, on her side, was deeply in love with him. The King, however, changed his mind, and told Soissons that he must look elsewhere for a wife. The latter, however, declined to bow to the royal will, and, without Henri's knowledge, he left the army and made a journey to Pau, where he and Catherine signed a mutual promise of marriage, which they would in all probability have carried out at the first convenient opportunity, but for the prompt intervention of Paujas, the President of the Supreme Council of Béarn,[2] who, ascertaining what was in the wind, caused the princess to be guarded closely, and obliged Soissons to leave Pau.

There can be no possible doubt that Madame de Gramont, to whose care Henri had entrusted his sister, had encouraged her to defy the King and been privy to

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[1] Charles de Bourbon (1560-1612), son of Louis I., Prince de Condé, by his second wife, Françoise d'Orléans-Longueville.

[2] François Charles, Baron de Pardaillan-Paujas. He had married Henri IV.'s former mistress, Mlle. de Tignonville.

Soissons' schemes, probably out of revenge for the more frequent infidelities and the growing coldness of her royal lover; and the latter marks his displeasure at her conduct by the following severe letter:

"Madame,—I commissioned . . . to speak to you touching what, to my regret, has passed between my sister and yourself. Far from finding you capable of believing me, he has found that all your discourse tends only to blame me and incite my sister to do what she ought not to do. I did not expect that of you, to whom I will only say these words: that all persons who seek to set my sister at variance with me will never have my forgiveness."

With this letter, which is tantamount to a sentence of disgrace, the romantic correspondence of Henri IV. with Madame de Gramont terminates.

Corisande lived until 1620, or, according to some writers, until 1624. In middle-age, L'Estoile tells us, she became, "very fat, corpulent and red in the face," and Sully adds that she was ashamed that folks should say that the King had once loved her so much. The latter part of her life was passed on her estates in Béarn, which she never quitted. Her ungrateful lover appears to have ignored her existence for some years, but in September 1597, at the suggestion of the countess's relative, the Marquis de Parabère, who reproached him with a too abrupt and humiliating dismissal, he wrote her an extremely flattering letter, thanking her for the great services which she had rendered him in Béarn and assuring her of his friendship and esteem. From that time onwards he gave her many proofs of his confidence, while her son, Antoine II., Comte de Gramont, was high in the royal favour and was appointed Viceroy of Navarre.

It is possible that Madame de Gramont might have retained the favour, if not the affection, of the King, for some time longer, and that Henri might have continued to kiss her hands, at least on paper, had not a new passion led him to seize so excellent a pretext for terminating a now irksome connection.

In November 1590, the Royal army happened to encamp in the neighbourhood of the Château of Cœuvres, in Picardy, the country-seat of the Marquis Antoine d'Estrées, Grand Master of the Artillery, at that time a prisoner in the hands of the Leaguers. By his marriage with Françoise Babou de la Bourdaisière, a lady who came of "a race the most fertile in *femmes galantes* which France has ever seen,"[1] and who had taken care to live up to the reputation of her family,[2] Antoine d'Estrées had two sons[3] and six daughters, all remarkable for their good looks. The pick of the basket was the fourth girl, Gabrielle, and one of the King's favourites, the Grand Equerry, the Duc de Bellegarde, a devoted admirer of the young lady, extolled her beauty to his master with such enthusiasm that Henri's curiosity was piqued, and he accompanied him on a visit to the château. On his arrival, he found that even a lover's tongue had done but scant justice to the charms of Gabrielle, whose beauty, grace and simplicity made so profound an impression on the susceptible heart of the Béarnais that he departed madly in love.

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[1] Tallemant des Réaux.

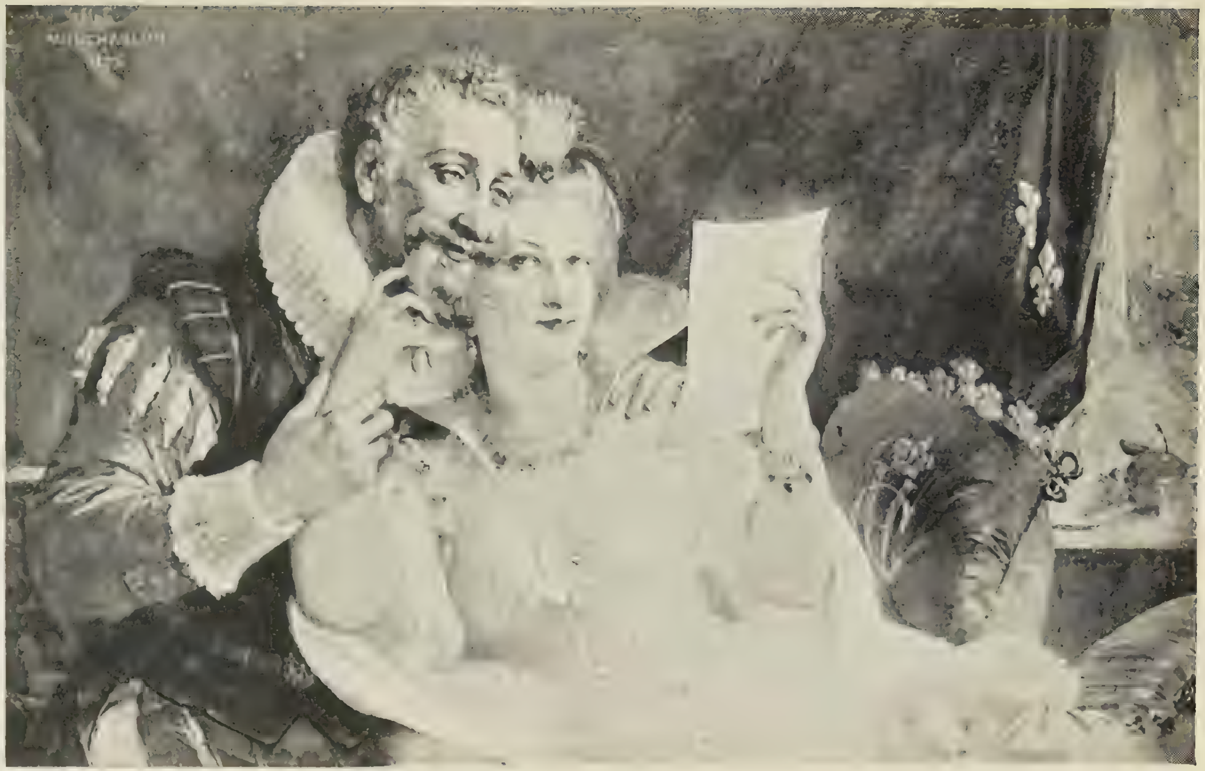
[2] She had been the mistress, amongst others, of François de Béranger, Seigneur du Guast, one of the favourites of Henri III., who was assassinated by Guillaume de Prat, Baron de Viteaux, in 1575. Some years later, Viteaux was killed in a duel by the young Marquis d'Alègre, whose father he had slain in a similar affair shortly before his assassination of Du Guast. Madame d'Estrées sent for the victor to congratulate him, and fell so much in love with him that, one fine day in 1583, although then over forty, she left her husband and children and went to live with Alègre. When, in 1590, Alègre was appointed Governor of Issoire, in Auvergne, she followed him thither. But their rapacity so exasperated the townspeople that, in June, 1592, a party of them rose in revolt, stormed the governor's house and murdered both him and Madame d'Estrées.

[3] The elder, François Louis, Marquis de Cœuvres, was killed during the siege of Laon, in 1594. The younger, François Annibal, attained considerable distinction both as a diplomatist and a soldier. In 1626 he was created a marshal of France, in recognition of his gallant defence of Mantua against the Spaniards, and, in 1648, Duc d'Estrées. His memoirs, first issued in 1666, are of much interest, and have several times been reprinted, the best edition being that published by the Société de l'Histoire de France, in 1910.

If we may believe the author of "les Amours du Grand Alcandre," no sooner had the enamoured monarch left her presence than he felt that at all risks he must return. Cœuvres was surrounded by parties of the enemy, but prudence and dignity were alike forgotten, and, disguised as a wood-cutter, with a bundle of faggots on his head, the King of France made his way to the feet of his new enchantress. His overtures, however, met with a very chilly reception, and Gabrielle, having informed her royal admirer that "she found him so ugly that she was unable to look upon him," abruptly quitted the room and sent one of her younger sisters, Diane, to entertain him.

Whatever truth there may be in this story, and, since we know that, in later years, Henri adopted a somewhat similar disguise in order to approach Charlotte de Montmorency, Princesse de Condé, it seems probable enough, the King's passion persisted, although during the next nine months he only saw, or rather caught a glimpse of, Gabrielle on two or three occasions. But in the month of August 1591, the girl's aunt, Madame de Sourdis, who had discovered his Majesty's passion and desired for her husband the government of Chartres, then besieged by the Royal army, brought her to the camp. True or false, the rumour immediately ran that she was the mistress of the King.

Meantime, the Marquis d'Estrées had recovered his liberty. This nobleman, whom the *anecdotiers* and several historians have represented as a party to his daughter's dishonour, intervened, on the contrary, energetically to nip the scandal in the bud. On her return to Cœuvres, Gabrielle received from him the order to prepare to marry Nicolas d'Amerval, Seigneur de Liencourt, a widower with fourteen children. Of a docile disposition, she obeyed without resistance, and, although her lord and master was double her age and



Henri IV. and Gabrielle Estrées.

From the painting by Monchablon.

[*To face p.* 30.

something more than plain in appearance, she would probably have resigned herself to the situation, like so many other victims of marriages of convenience, but for a regrettable misadventure which happened to the poor man just before the ceremony: he was deprived of a part of his faculties in consequence of a fall from his horse. This time Gabrielle yielded to the sincere inclination which was drawing her towards the King, and three months later (December 1591), she rejoined him, and did not leave him again.

On June 7, 1593, Gabrielle bore the King a son, and shortly afterwards, at the instigation of his Majesty, little desirous of one day seeing doubts arise as to the child's paternity, began an action for nullity of marriage before the ecclesiastical courts. Her suit was successful,[1] and the little boy, who had been given the name of César, was duly acknowledged and legitimated by his royal father and created Duc de Vendôme. After her emancipation Gabrielle was successively created Marquise de Monceaux and Duchesse de Beaufort, and installed triumphantly as *maîtresse en titre*. She bore the King another son, called Alexandre and also legitimated, and a daughter, Catherine Henriette, afterwards married to the Duc d'Elbeuf; and Henri's attachment to her grew stronger as time went on, though Bellegarde, at any rate, continued to be a not unfavoured rival.[2]

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[1] But not on the ground of "*l'incapacité conjugale de M. de Liencourt*," as is generally supposed. Gabrielle alleged three reasons why the marriage should be annulled: (1) That she had been unduly constrained thereto by her father; (2) her husband's incapacity, which had prevented the union from being consummated; (3) propinquity of relationship, M. de Liencourt's first wife, Anne de Gouffier, having been second cousin to Gabrielle, and no dispensation for the marriage having been obtained. The court dismissed the first and second pleas, but accepted the third. Why it should not have accepted the second also, is not quite clear, since it was undoubtedly true, and it was on this ground that, in February 1600, Marguerite d'Autun, whom Liencourt had made his third wife, obtained the dissolution of their marriage.

[2] As Henri's own letters prove. "The influence your eyes have on me," he writes to Gabrielle on one occasion, "saved you from half my reproaches. But, if I had known what I have since learned of my rival's visit, I should not have seen you, but have broken with you for good. . . .

"Good-bye, sweetheart," writes the King to her, from Saint-Denis, on the evening before his abjuration; "come in good time to-morrow, for it seems to me a year since I saw you. A thousand kisses for the hands of my angel and the lips of my dear mistress." And again: "I am writing to you, my dear love, at the foot of your picture, which I worship, because it is meant for you, not because it is like you. I am a competent judge, since you are painted in all perfection, in my soul, in my heart, in my eyes."

The portraits of Gabrielle scarcely justify the extravagant terms in which her contemporaries celebrate her beauty; but she was undoubtedly a very pretty woman, with a dazzling complexion, golden hair and blue eyes shaded by long lashes. Moreover, she was sweet-tempered, kind-hearted and affectionate, and probably sincerely attached to the King, notwithstanding her occasional infidelities. She used her influence with moderation, and to the advantage of others rather than to their detriment, and conducted herself with such decorum that even stern Calvinists declared that her behaviour was "that of a wife rather than of a mistress."

At last, Henri began to entertain serious thoughts of marrying his Gabrielle, so soon as he could secure the dissolution of his marriage with Marguerite de Valois, who, aware that, after so compromising a past, she could never hope to be Queen of France in anything but name, had consented to forgo the crown matrimonial, in exchange for the payment of her debts, which amounted to an enormous sum, a handsome pension and other advantages. Sully relates that at the time of the Peace of Vervins (May 2, 1598), the King one day drew him into a garden, and, after carefully closing the door, approached the delicate subject of his divorce and remarriage. The Pope, he was assured by his Ambassador

What more can you promise than you have already promised? What oath can you swear that you have not twice broken?" However, as he concludes by declaring that he would give four years of his life to reach his mistress as soon as his letter, it is to be doubted whether his reproaches can have had much effect on the lady.

at Rome and those about the Papal Court, was anxious to serve him in the matter of a divorce, and it therefore behoved him to find a wife without delay. He then proceeded to enumerate all the marriageable foreign princesses and French girls of high rank, to each and all of whom, however, he contrived to discover some fatal objection as a possible Queen.

"Ah well, sire," said Sully, "cause all the most beautiful girls in France from seventeen to twenty-five to be brought together; converse with them, study their hearts, study their minds, and finally place yourself in the hands of matrons of experience in such matters."

The King laughed and accused his Minister of jesting at his expense. "What would people say of such an assembly of girls?" he remarked. "But be sure that the wife I seek must, above all, be a sweet-tempered woman, of good appearance, and likely to bear me children. Do you know of one who unites all these qualities?" The cautious Sully replied that he had not considered the matter. "Well, what will you say if I name her in whom I have found them all?" cried the King. "That could not be, unless in the case of a widow," rejoined the Minister. "Ah, big fool that you are! Confess that all the conditions I desire I find in my mistress!" exclaimed Henri.

Towards the end of 1598, it was generally known that the King, despite the strenuous opposition of Sully and Duplessis-Mornay, intended to marry the Duchesse de Beaufort. Such a resolution aroused universal alarm. Gabrielle had many friends and few enemies, but not even her most devoted partisans could maintain that her birth and previous life fitted her to be the Queen of France; while it was clear that the opposing claims of her legitimate sons and of those who might be born in wedlock would raise difficulties of which no one could foresee the end. Further, Clement VIII. disapproved of his Majesty's choice, less probably on account of Gabrielle's obvious unsuitability to share a throne, as because she was the intimate friend of the King's sister

Catherine, now Duchess of Bar, and also of Louise de Coligny, widow of William the Silent, Prince of Orange. These two ladies were among the most stubborn heretics in Europe, and his Holiness did not doubt that, urged by them, Gabrielle would use all her influence with the King in favour of their co-religionists. He therefore refused to dissolve the marriage, sheltering himself behind the difficulties regarding the succession in which such a marriage must involve France.

This paternal solicitude for his kingdom did not deceive Henri IV., who, impatient at the delay, instructed his representatives at the Vatican to hint that, if the Holy Father continued contumacious, the Eldest Son of the Church might be tempted to behave in an exceedingly unfilial manner and follow the example of his last namesake on the throne of England. Whether, with this threat hanging over him, Clement would eventually have yielded, is a matter of opinion ; but an unexpected event came to relieve the tension.

On April 6, 1599, the Duchesse de Beaufort, who was then in an advanced stage of pregnancy, left Fontainebleau, where the Court was then in residence, to spend Easter in Paris.[1] She lodged at the Deanery of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, with her aunt, Madame de Sourdis, but in the evening supped at the house of an Italian financier named Zamet, who had risen from a very humble station to great wealth and the intimate friendship of the King. Next day she attended the *Tenebræ* at the Couvent du Petit Saint-Antoine, at that time renowned for its fine music. During the service she was taken ill, and was carried to Zamet's house, which was close to the convent, where she recovered sufficiently to return home. On the 8th, although still feeling unwell, she attended Mass at Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, being carried thither in a litter, escorted by the archers of the Guard and followed by the Lorraine princesses and a number of other ladies in carriages. While in church she was again taken ill, and, on returning to her relative's house, fell into violent convulsions. On the 9th (Good Friday) she gave birth to a still-born child, and on the following morning, after forty hours of atrocious sufferings, she expired. The public, learning that she had fallen ill after supping with Zamet, persisted in the belief that he had caused her to be poisoned, for political reasons. Italians bore a sinister reputation in those days, and, indeed, down to a much later period, but this theory is now generally discredited.

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[1] Henri IV. accompanied her so far as Savigny, about midway between Fontainebleau and Paris, where she entered her barge to make the rest of the journey by water. Bassompierre, who, with the Duc de Montbazon and the Marquis de la Varenne, had been chosen to escort her, tells us that, at the moment of parting from the King, Gabrielle broke down and began to weep bitterly, declaring that she had a presentiment that she should never see him again. The King, after vainly endeavouring to console her, was on the point of giving way and taking her back to Fontainebleau. But, in view of their intended marriage, he attached great importance to the duchess performing her Easter devotions in the capital, and, after repeated embraces, he freed himself from her detaining arms and gave the signal for the barge to start.

A singular circumstance about the death of Gabrielle is that Henri IV. was informed of it on the day before it actually occurred. On the 9th, La Varenne, learning that the King, who had been warned of the illness of the duchess, was travelling post to Paris, and wishing either to spare him the sight of his mistress, whom, Bassompierre tells us, he had seen on the Thursday afternoon "so changed that she was almost unrecognizable," or to avoid a scandal, took upon himself to announce the event which he knew to be inevitable and close at hand, and sent the Maréchal d'Ornano and Bassompierre to intercept him.

"We met the King beyond La Saussaye, near Villejuif, travelling at the top speed of his horses," writes the latter. "When he saw the marshal, he suspected that he was the bearer of ill news, which caused him to weep bitterly. Finally, they made him alight at the Abbey of La Saussaye, where they laid him on a bed. He gave vent to every excess of grief which it is possible to describe."

He wanted to continue his journey to Paris, in order to see Gabrielle and to hold her in his arms, and his attendants had almost to use force to place him in a coach and take him back to Fontainebleau. On arriving there, he ascended to the Salle de la Cheminée and begged everyone to return to Paris "to pray God for his consolation," keeping with him only a few of his most intimate friends. As Bassompierre was about to take leave of him, he said: "Bassompierre, you were the last who was with my mistress; stay with me to talk to me of her." "So I remained also, and we were eight or ten days without the company being augmented, if one excepts certain of the Ambassadors, who came to condole with him and then returned to Paris immediately."[1]

The death of the Duchesse de Beaufort created an immense sensation in Paris, and "twenty thousand persons defiled through the chamber of death."[2] The obsequies took place on April 17, and, by the orders of the King, were similar to those of the Princesses of the Blood. An effigy of the deceased was exposed, according to custom, on a bed of state, which was draped in the colours of the House of France—crimson velvet and gold tassels. The corpse itself was dressed in a mantle of white satin, and a Mass was celebrated at Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, which was attended by the whole Court. Finally, the remains of the mother and child were transported to Saint-Denis, where a solemn service was held, and then buried at the Abbey of Maubuisson, of which one of Gabrielle's sisters was abbess.

Meantime, the King remained prostrated with grief. Violet, in which the sovereigns of France were accustomed to mourn, was not sombre enough to express the depths of his despair. He clad himself in black and wore it for three months.[3] And we find him writing to his sister Catherine, in answer to a letter of condolence[1] which she had sent him :

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[1] "Mémoires de Bassompierre." The Parlement of Paris also sent a deputation to condole with the grief-stricken King.

[2] "Mémoires de Chaverny."

[3] The Court was ordered to go into violet mourning for a similar period.

"My affliction is incomparable, like unto her who is the cause of it. Regrets and tears will follow me to the tomb. The root of my love is dead, and will never put forth another branch."

However, as we shall presently see, he was not long in finding consolation.

When with Gabrielle had disappeared the great obstacle to a divorce, petitions poured in from all parts of the kingdom begging the King to marry again. Deputations from the Parlements, the municipal bodies and the religious corporations waited upon his Majesty to present addresses, wherein were pointed out the advantages of a new union, which might procure him successors and thus assure the tranquillity of the realm. While Henri's representatives at Rome redoubled their efforts to induce Clement VIII. to annul his marriage with Marguerite, his Ministers, undeterred by the many evils of which a Florentine marriage had before been the cause, opened negotiations with the Grand Duke of Tuscany for the hand of his niece Marie, daughter of his brother and predecessor, Francesco de' Medici. Marie de' Medici was twenty-five, with a sufficiency of good looks to satisfy a not too exacting husband—or, at least, the King was persuaded to believe so—and the prospect of a rich dowry. Moreover, she was the niece of the Pope, a circumstance which would doubtless induce his Holiness to expedite the divorce.

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[1] Her letter is worth reproducing : "My dear King, I am well aware that no words can cure your great grief. I only write these to assure you that I share it as completely as I needs must, owing to my extreme love for you and to my own loss of so perfect a friend. I greatly wish that I had been with you, to offer you in your affliction all the love and service that I owe you. Believe me, my dear King, I shall always act a mother's part to my nephews and niece. I humbly beg that you will remember that you have promised me my niece. If you will let me have her, I will treat her with as much love and care as if she were my own daughter. . . . If it pleased God, my King, that I could lighten your grief by the sacrifice of some years of my life, I would pray with all my heart that it might be so, and upon this truth I kiss you a thousand times, my dear and brave King."

Matters now went smoothly enough, and on September 24, Clement, having no longer to fear the influence of Gabrielle d'Estrées and her Huguenot friends, delegated the Cardinal de Joyeuse, the Bishop of Modena—the Papal Nuncio at the French Court—and Horace Montan, Archbishop of Arles, "to inquire into the affair."

The inquiry was opened at the Louvre on October 15, and on November 10, 1599, the Papal commissioners declared the marriage of Henri and Marguerite null and void, *de facto* and *de jure*. On December 17, the dissolution was confirmed by the Parlement, on account of blood relationship, "spiritual affinity,"[1] violence and the failure of one of the parties to consent to it, and on the 22nd the decree was proclaimed "solemnly and publicly," with open doors, in the Church of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois.

The King was divorced, but he was not yet re-married. While his Ministers were haggling with the Grand Duke of Tuscany over the price at which their master should sell his hand, his Majesty had once more lost the heart which he had fondly imagined was buried in poor Gabrielle's grave. Scarcely two months after his mistress's death, his love—to borrow his own expression—had "put forth another branch," and one which threatened to bear fruit of a most embarrassing kind.

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[1] Henri II., Marguerite's father, had stood godfather to Henri of Navarre in 1554. The argument was that this spiritual affinity had required a special Papal dispensation, and that that sent by Gregory XIII., in 1572, only applied to the blood relationship.

CHAPTER III

Visit of Henri IV. to the Entragues family at their Château of Bois-Malesherbes — François de Balzac, Seigneur d'Entragues — His chequered career—His marriage with Marie Touchet, mistress of Charles IX.—Henriette d'Entragues—Her appearance and character —The King becomes infatuated with her—Portrait of Henri IV. at this period—His advances at first coldly received by the lady—An interrupted *tête-à-tête*—Mlle. de la Châtre—The King follows the Entragues to Paris—The pearl necklace—Affray at Zamet's house between the Prince de Joinville and the Duc de Bellegarde—The Entragues leave Paris—Liaison of Henri IV. with Marie de la Bourdaisière—Henriette demands the sum of 100,000 écus—" *Ventre Saint-Gris ! Voilà une nuit bien payée !* "—Diplomatic conduct of Henriette—The promise of marriage—Interview between the King and Sully at Fontainebleau—Demands of M. d'Entragues—New negotiations—Henriette becomes the mistress of the King.

SITUATED at a short distance from Pithiviers and overlooking the narrow valley of the Essonne, stands the old Château of Bois-Malesherbes. Two of its four towers no longer exist, and its chapel is in ruins ; but the chamber which Henri IV. occupied on his frequent visits to the château is still intact ; hung with the same old tapestries on which the eyes of the King must have often rested, *le Triomphe de la Renommée* and *la Vision d'Ezéchiel.* Beneath the latter is a quaint legend :

> " Mort, femme et temps, tout, soit veil et antique,
> Mondaine amour et chasteté pudique,
> Tout prendra fin."

It was in the first days of June, 1599, that Henri IV. passing through the Beauce, on his way from Fontainebleau to Blois, paid his first visit to Bois-Malesherbes, at that time the property of François de Balzac, Seigneur d'Entragues et de Marcoussis and governor of Orléans. The loss of his beloved mistress still weighed heavily upon the King, and his intimates, La Varenne at their head, in the hope of finding some distraction for their disconsolate master, had advised him to stop at Malesherbes, telling him that two very pretty girls—Entragues's daughters—were to be found there. This was quite sufficient to decide the monarch, who little thought that he was about to fall into the hands of a family of intriguers, of elastic conscience and without the smallest scruple where there was a question of anything to their advantage.

The Balzacs came originally from Auvergne and were an old and not undistinguished family. One of them, Jean de Balzac, had rendered considerable financial assistance to Charles VII. in his struggles against the English; another, Roffec, had been seneschal of the Agénais and governor of Pisa under Charles VIII.; and a third, Guillaume, a staunch adherent of the House of Lorraine, had been governor of Le Hâvre and lieutenant of Duc François de Guise's company of men-at-arms. Guillaume had two sons, Charles and François. Charles, surnamed *le bel Entraguet*, was originally one of the favourites of Henri III.; but he deserted the King to attach himself to Henri de Guise, who protected him against the vengeance of his sovereign after he had killed the latter's beloved Quélus in the famous Duel of the Mignons. His brother François, governor successively of Chartres and Orléans, rendered some service to the Royal cause during the first Wars of Religion. But when the troubles between Henri III. and the League began, he played fast and loose with both parties, being in turn Royalist, Guisard, then Royalist again. On the accession of Henri IV., he became a Leaguer once more, and when the King entered Paris, he gave orders to Sully to "drive away the Balzacs and all their gang."

The reputation of François de Balzac was sullied by two particularly villainous actions:

In October 1567, a few days after the flight of Catherine de' Medici and Charles IX. from Meaux to Paris, which preceded the Second War of Religion, the

Marquise de Rothelin, his aunt, had shut herself up in the Château of Blandy, with the children of her son-in-law, the Prince de Condé. She believed herself in safety there, and had refused to follow the wives and daughters of the Huguenot chiefs who had taken refuge at Orléans. Entragues, under the pretext of bringing her news, persuaded her to open the gates of the château. Then, with his men-at-arms, he fell upon and massacred the servants of his aunt, and carried off the marchioness and Condé's children to Catherine de' Medici.

Later, during the Wars of the League, he offered for a very large sum of money to open the gates of Orléans, of which he was governor, to Henri IV. If the bargain were not kept, it was thanks to the energy of the defenders of the place, who refused to surrender.

On the death of his first wife, Jacqueline de Rohan, in 1578, Entragues married the celebrated Marie Touchet, a woman of great beauty and of considerable intelligence, who is said to have been his mistress before becoming that of Charles IX.[1] This union was a very advantageous one for him, since Marie had been well provided for by her royal lover, and, besides, it made him step-father and guardian of the King's natural son, Charles de Valois, to whom Catherine de' Medici, passing over her daughter Marguerite, afterwards bequeathed her county of Auvergne.

By his second marriage, Entragues had a son and two daughters, Henriette and Marie—two daughters who were to prove as vicious as their mother, and over whom the latter watched with jealous care, desiring for them a brilliant future.[1] When, after peace had been at last restored to the distracted country, Henri IV., with the aid of Gabrielle d'Estrées, regarded already as Queen, had formed a sort of court of nobles and ladies, which was to recall, to some degree at least, that of Catherine de' Medici, Entragues, notwithstanding his sadly tarnished reputation, succeeded in obtaining the admission of his wife and Henriette. In 1598, we find the latter, with eleven other ladies and twelve of the handsomest nobles of the Court, figuring in a ballet which was given at the Tuileries and afterwards at the residence of the Duchess of Bar, on which occasion she would appear to have created a very favourable impression.[2]

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[1] Marie Touchet was born at Orléans in 1549, and was the daughter, not of an apothecary of that town, as some writers assert, but of Jean Touchet, Sieur de Beauvais et du Quillard, lieutenant of the bailiwick of Orléans, and of Marie Mathys, daughter of a Fleming, Orath Mathys, physician to the King. A portrait reproduced by Bouchet, in his "Portraits au crayon," shows us a woman with a perfect oval face, fine eyes, a high forehead, a thin, straight nose and thin lips; in fact, one with less of beauty than of that charm which justified the anagram drawn from her name: "*Je charme tout.*" Charles IX. appears to have met her at Orléans, about the end of 1566 or the beginning of 1567, and he remained greatly attached to her down to the time of his death. She never, however, attempted to exercise any political influence over him, nor even to enrich herself at the expense of the State, as did so many royal favourites, entertaining, it is probable, a wholesome dread of the enmity of Catherine de' Medici.

It was, in fact, upon Mlle. d'Entragues, the elder, that the courtiers had chiefly counted to cheer the disconsolate monarch when they advised him to break his journey at the fatal Château of Bois-Malesherbes. Henriette, born at Orléans in 1579, had just completed her twentieth year. Without being strictly beautiful, for her nose was not above reproach—"*un bec effilé*," is Sully's description of it—and her lips were thin and when in repose ill-tempered, she was an undeniably pretty girl, with a slender, supple figure, blonde hair, blue eyes and a bewitching smile. Her good looks, however, were only a part of her attractions, for all her contemporaries seemed to be agreed that her grace, her intelligence, her vivacity and her ready wit rendered her marvellously fascinating. Except her appearance, there was nothing of the young girl about her. Ripe for intrigue, courtesan by instinct, greedy, ambitious,

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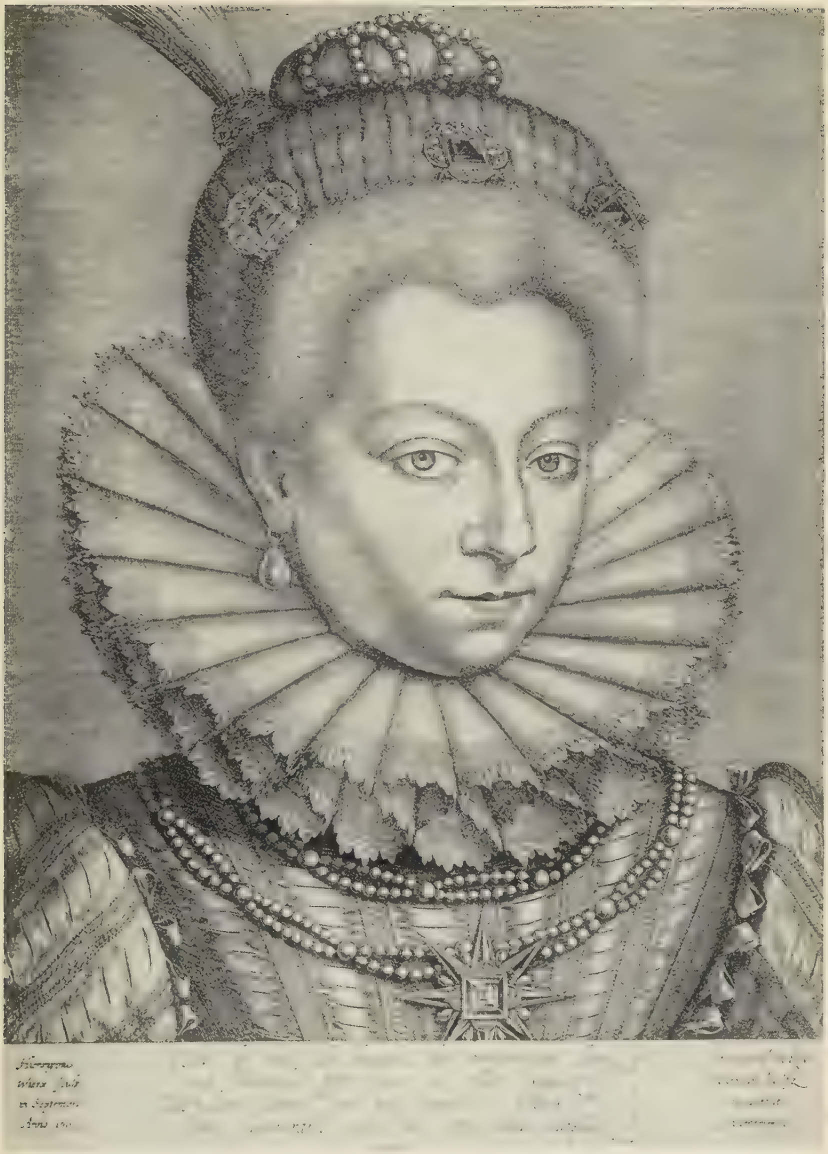
[1] "With all the severity of a rigid duenna, she watched over a treasure of which she knew the value, and it was whispered that she had poniarded with her own hand a young page who had been too familiar with Henriette." Comte Hector de la Ferrière: "Henri IV.—le Roi—l'Amoureux."

[2] But we question the accuracy of M. Merki's assertion: "*Le cœur du roi était pris en ce moment.*" Henri IV. would appear to have been at Monceaux, where he was recovering from a somewhat severe illness.



Henriette de Balzac d'Entragues, Marquise de Verneuil.

[*To face p.* 42.

unscrupulous, she had early practised the art of provoking and exciting the passions which she did not share, but by which she meant one day to profit. Mistress of all the tricks and manœuvres of her type, she could play many parts and transform herself at will. She could be naïve, cynical, tender, cold, coquettish, reserved, humble, imperious, according to the requirements of the moment.

In character, as in outward presentment, no greater contrast to Gabrielle d'Estrées, with her regular features, her full figure, and her gentle and placid disposition, could well be imagined. But the veterans of gallantry, greedy of change, allow themselves to be seduced easily by these contrasts, and perhaps the very fact that nothing in Henriette d'Entragues could remind him of her whom he had lost may have accounted for her speedy subjugation of the King. Anyway, from the first evening Henri IV. appears to have become completely infatuated with this dangerous creature, and on the morrow of his visit he despatched two of his intimates, Castelnau de Charosse and the Comte de Lude, to Malesherbes, charged with certain vague negotiations, which were merely intended to give a pretext for returning. Entragues, in the course of conversation, remarked that, in order to seek distraction from the melancholy into which the death of the Duchesse de Beaufort had thrown him, the King ought to pass some days at Malesherbes, the neighbourhood of which afforded most excellent hunting; he would deem it a great honour to entertain him. Needless to say, his Majesty was graciously pleased to accept the invitation and proceeded to Malesherbes with ten or a dozen gentlemen. This second and longer visit more than confirmed the impressions of the first. It seemed to the amorous monarch that he had never met anyone quite so fascinating as Henriette before. The novelty of the girl, her vivacity, her witty sallies, which spared no one, the King no more than anyone else, captivated him. Poor Gabrielle, for whom he still wore mourning, was forgotten. This new passion had effaced from his heart every other recollection. Henceforth, he felt unable to lose sight of Henriette, and, when he left Malesherbes, it was to go to the Château du Hallier, which belonged to Louis de l'Hôpital, his Captain of the Guards, and was scarcely a league distant from Chemault, the property of Guillaume Pot, one of the King's equerries, to whom the Entragues were about to pay a visit. Nothing now remained for the siren and her relatives but to play the cards which Fortune had placed in their hands, and this they did with incontestable skill.

At the date at which we have arrived, Henri IV. was forty-six, and it must be admitted that there was little enough about him calculated to appeal to any woman, least of all a charming girl of twenty. Madame de Simier, who had known Henri III., his predecessor, once observed : " I have seen the King, but I have not seen his Majesty." And certainly the Béarnais, so far as appearance went, was very far removed from the popular conception of a great monarch. He was a little, swarthy man, with a long, hooked nose, which resembled that of a Punchinello, and a pointed chin.[1] His merry, bright eyes, " full of amorous desires," still shone with all the fire of his youth ; but his back was a little bent, his countenance lined with premature wrinkles and his hair and beard had turned grey. He was careless and slovenly in his dress and, what was far worse, dirty—some of his contemporaries use a stronger expression—in his person, from which emanated a most unpleasant odour. In fact, apart from his title of King, he had nothing to commend him to the good graces of the fair, except his high spirits and his infectious gaiety. Nevertheless, with true Gascon conceit, he flattered himself that he was still capable of inspiring a disinterested passion, and, encouraged by the mediocre reputation of the Entragues, he appears to have counted upon a prompt and easy victory.

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[1] The Duchesse de Rohan said that " Love would not have been able to nestle between a nose and a chin which mingled with one another."

He speedily discovered his mistake. Henriette, at first, gave him some slight encouragement, but when, emboldened by this, her admirer became more pressing, she repulsed him sharply. Thereupon his Majesty began to launch forth into promises, and made to glitter before the girl's eyes, as he had before those of so many others, all the advantages which she would derive from surrendering to his will: money, jewels, a title, an estate, official recognition as his mistress. But the Entragues, who had very accurately gauged the extent of the monarch's infatuation, were resolved to secure far better terms than these. Counselled, doubtless, by her relatives, Henriette cleverly simulated offended modesty, assured the King that, though she loved him, honour was dearer to her than life, and besought him to press her no more. Finally, one morning, her half-brother, the Comte d'Auvergne, brusquely interrupted their *tête-à-tête* and gave the King to understand very plainly that his attentions to the young lady must cease.

Greatly disappointed, but far from despairing, Henri IV. took himself off to Châteauneuf, where the Maréchale de la Châtre awaited him with her two charming daughters, each of whom asked nothing better than to be allowed to console the quasi-widower, and between whom their fond mother hoped he would choose. His Majesty permitted himself to respond to the advances of the prettiest, but it was only a passing caprice; already he was no longer master of his will, and learning that Madame d'Entragues and Henriette had gone to Paris, he departed incontinently for the capital.

On arriving there, the Louvre not being ready for his reception, he took up his quarters at the Hôtel de Gondi, quite close to the Hôtel de Lyon, where Madame d'Entragues and her daughter were staying, and lost no time in dispatching the Comte de Lude to present his compliments to the ladies. The count reported that he had been very coldly received by Henriette, nor did his master's letters and billets-doux meet with any better success. In the hope of melting the ice, the King sent his charmer a magnificent pearl necklace. Henriette promptly returned the costly gift, which on the morrow his Majesty replaced by a hundred apricots.[1]

On August 10, Henri IV. supped with the Duc d'Elbeuf and a merry company of nobles, amongst whom were Charles de Lorraine, Prince de Joinville, younger brother of the Duc de Guise, and the Grand Equerry, the Duc de Bellegarde—*Monsieur le Grand*, as he was officially styled. Both of these gallants were, or had been, in love with Henriette d'Entragues, who had sent *Monsieur le Grand* about his business, but, on the other hand, would appear to have been far from insensible to the admiration of the Lorraine prince, prior to the King's appearance upon the scene. At the conclusion of the banquet, Henri entered his coach to go to Zamet's house, which was called, and with reason, "*l'hôtel des menus plaisirs du roi*," and where, Bassompierre tells us, his Majesty had arranged to pass the night with "a pretty wench called la Glandée."[2] As Zamet's house, situated in the Rue de la Cerisaie, near the Bastille, was some considerable distance from the Hôtel d'Elbeuf, all the guests escorted the King thither on horseback.

It was a fine night, and, after the King had retired to bed, the nobles who had accompanied him remained chatting in the courtyard. Suddenly, a quarrel broke out between the Prince de Joinville and Bellegarde, the former accusing the Grand Equerry of having, out of spite, denounced him to the King as a rival in the affections of Mlle. d'Entragues. It ended by Joinville, who must have had a great deal more wine than was good for him, drawing his rapier and making a savage lunge at Bellegarde, which wounded him in the thigh. The wounded man took refuge in the house, while his friend, the Marquis de Villars rushed at Joinville and would perhaps have killed him, had not the young Comte de Rambouillet thrown himself between them and received the thrust intended for the prince. In another moment every sword was out, and the mêlée threatened to become general, when the King, "in his shirt and sword in hand," appeared at the top of the flight of steps leading down to the courtyard. Thereupon the combatants sheathed their weapons, and Joinville prudently took to flight. The King, extremely angry, sent that same night for Achille de Harlay, First President of the Parlement, and gave orders that he should hold an inquiry into the affair and show no favour to anyone. Early on the morrow, however, the Duchesse de Nemours and Mlle. de Guise, Joinville's grandmother and sister, came to implore him to pardon the offender. At first the King was inflexible, jealousy perhaps counting for something in his severity; but eventually he relented so far as to give orders that the proceedings which had been begun against Joinville should go no further and content himself by exiling the prince from the Court and Paris.

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[1] "Journal de L'Estoile."

[2] The same chronicler mentions two other women who about this time were honoured by certain fugitive attentions from the King: a Madame de Boinville and a Mlle. Clin. "Mlle. Clin," or rather Madame Quelin, was the mother of one Nicolas Quelin, counsellor to the Grande Chambre of the Parlement of Paris, who claimed, wrongly it would appear, to be the son of Henri IV.

This affair, as may be supposed, caused no little scandal, which may, perhaps, have decided the Entragues to cut short their visit to Paris. Anyway, a few days later, to the great chagrin of the King, they departed for their Château of Marcoussis.

The enamoured monarch resolved to follow them so soon as possible, but meantime he returned to Blois, whence he proceeded to Chenonceaux, on a visit to Louise of Lorraine, who, since the tragic death of Henri III., had lived there in strict retirement. Amongst the Queen-dowager's maids-of-honour was Marie de la Bourdaisière,[1] a kinswoman of Gabrielle d'Estrées, and, to pass the time, the Vert-Galant made love to her. The lady's resistance was brief, and there was a moment when it seemed likely that she might succeed in detaching him from Henriette. "But the allurement of an unsatisfied desire triumphs most often over possession,"[1] and, recalled without doubt by Mlle. d'Entragues, he hurried off to Marcoussis. There, after an interview in which the girl's coquetry had driven the infatuated King almost to the verge of distraction, she demanded the sum of 100,000 écus as the price of her surrender. Henri, on his return to Paris, requested this sum of Sully, his Surintendant des Finances, who "raised cries of anguish," having at that moment to find three or four million livres for the renewal of the alliance with the Swiss. His remonstrances, however, were unheeded, though it was not until he received a formal order from the King to bring the 100,000 écus demanded to the Louvre that he could constrain himself to obey. But at first he brought only 50,000, hoping to save the rest, and ordered the Treasury clerks who carried the bags containing the money to spread them out on the floor of the King's cabinet, in order that his Majesty might see with his own eyes what such a sum, so easy to promise and so difficult to raise, represented. "*Ventre Saint-Gris!*" Henri IV. was unable to prevent himself from exclaiming. "*Voilà une nuit bien payée!*" Nevertheless, the reluctant Minister was obliged to disgorge the balance.

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[1] Daughter of Georges Babou, Seigneur de la Bourdaisière, Comte de Sagonne.

Mlle. d'Entragues duly got the money she had demanded, but the King got nothing except thanks, since the hundred thousand écus were only a part of the price which the cunning minx intended to exact, and she caused herself to be so jealously guarded by her father and mother that it was quite impossible for her to carry out her part of the bargain. At length, one day in the salon at Bois-Malesherbes, in a *tête-à-tête* which Madame d'Entragues had graciously permitted them, judging that she had by this time reduced the old gallant to such a state of despair that he would be ready to consent to almost anything, she made known her conditions.

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[1] La Ferrière, "Henri IV.—le Roi—l'Amoureux."

"O my King, O most amiable of men," said she, her eyes shining with hypocritical tenderness, "I trust myself so entirely to your love that I am able to refuse you nothing; but you know well that I do not belong to myself. It is not I, I who love you, that you must seek to persuade: it is my mother; it is my father."

The King inquired in what way he could do that. She answered that she dared not tell him. He pressed her, and, after some further hesitation, she told him that her parents exacted, besides the title of marchioness for her—"in order to guarantee their honour in the world and their conscience towards God"—a promise of marriage; a written promise. The example of Gabrielle d'Estrées, whom death alone had prevented from becoming Queen of France was, in fact, very tempting. Henriette was resolved to make the King marry her; she was unwilling to surrender except at this price. She added that she had used every endeavour to persuade her parents to be satisfied with a verbal promise, but they insisted that it should be in writing. "However," she went on, "it is all the same thing, for there is no document which can suffice to constrain a man who wears so good a sword and who has so much courage; who is able to raise at a word thirty thousand soldiers and to set thirty cannon in motion. Thus, since my relatives attach so much importance to this formality, you have but to yield, if you love me, satisfied that I shall then at last be able to accede to your least desires."

"O tyranny of love," cries the indignant Sully, in recounting this scene in his "Œconomies royales," "how great is then thy power! This cunning baggage, this designing creature, knew so well how to cajole the King that in the end he allowed himself to be persuaded into making this promise, since otherwise he would not be able to possess her who had already cost him so much and had so many times promised herself to him."

This promise, of which the copy at any rate has come down to us and is preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale, was dated from Bois-Malesherbes, October 1, 1599, and couched in the following terms :

"We, Henri the Fourth, by the grace of God, King of France and Navarre, promise and swear, by our faith and kingly word, to Messire François de Balzac, Sieur d'Entragues, chevalier of our orders, that he, giving us to be our consort (*pour compagne*) demoiselle Henriette Catherine de Balzac, his daughter, provided that within six months, to begin from the first day of this present month, she become pregnant and bear us a son, that forthwith we will take her to wife and legitimate spouse, and publicly solemnize the marriage and in the face of Our Holy Church, in accordance with the usual solemnities required in such cases. For the greater approbation of which promise, we promise and swear as above to ratify and renew it under our sign manual, immediately after we have obtained from Our Holy Father the Pope the dissolution of the marriage between us and dame Marguerite de France, with permission to remarry as shall seem good to us. In witness whereof we have written and signed the present, etc."[1]

And so we find Henri IV., after having been in love with so many women, actually promising to seat by his side, on the throne of France, a little intriguer, a coquette whom he desired to possess ! "But," observes M. Merki, "he was, as we know, but indifferently scrupulous, destitute, indeed, of all moral sense in certain respects, and an arrangement of this kind cost him little. He was prepared to swear and to promise all manner of things ; but he was firmly resolved not to keep them."[2]

Every time that the Vert-Galant engaged in a new adventure it was his habit to demand the advice of his mentor Sully, of which he entertained a very high opinion, though, unfortunately, he did not often follow it. Before, therefore, handing the compromising document which we have just cited to Mlle. d'Entragues, he decided to submit it to the Minister, and one morning, at Fontainebleau, led him into the grand gallery of the château, and without any preamble, placed the paper in his hands. Sully, who had probably been expecting something of the kind, read it with unmoved countenance and, without comment, made as though to return it to his master. "But speak," exclaimed the King, "speak quite freely!" The Minister read the fatal paper again, but he still remained silent. The King became impatient. "You do not wish then to speak," said he; "come, say everything that is in your mind. I assuredly owe you this compensation for the hundred thousand écus that I robbed you of. Speak; I shall not be annoyed." "Sire," answered Sully, "repeat a second time that assurance." Henri complied, upon which the other, instead of speaking, promptly tore up the promise of marriage. "*Comment, morbleu!*" cried the Monarch, astonished at such boldness. "Have you gone mad?" "Would to God, Sire, that I was the only madman in France!" replied the privileged Minister.

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[1] Bibliothèque Nationale, fonds Dupuy : "Lettres-Missives d'Henri IV.," t. V.

[2] "La Marquise de Verneuil."

The King stooped down, gathered up the torn pieces of the promise, and, without a word, retired to his apartments, where he told his secretary Loménie to bring him writing materials and proceeded to draw up a fresh one. A quarter of an hour later he emerged from his cabinet, and, without appearing to see Sully, who was awaiting him at the end of the gallery, went himself to convey the document to Mlle. d'Entragues.

That lady, meantime, was very much on her guard. "My heart," writes the enamoured King to her, "I love you so greatly that I can no longer exist when absent from you. I will see you this week, but I shall desire that it be in private rather than otherwise. Give me some opportunity for this."

But Henriette replied that she would not receive him except in public. The King, much chagrined, reproached her with this refusal:

"You must cease this brusqueness if you desire entire possession of my love. For, as King and as Gascon, I am unable to endure it. Further, those who love perfectly, as I do, wish to be flattered, not treated roughly. When M. d'Entragues comes here, I shall prove to you if I love you or not. Meantime, it ill becomes you to doubt it, and that offends me."

And he adds:

"Yesterday evening your diamond fell out of its setting, but, very happily, I found it again. God knows if I were in distress, for I should have preferred to lose the finger, holding so dear everything that comes from you, that nothing can compare with it. . . . I hope to see you on Sunday in public, since you have refused to see me in private."[1]

But even after the promise of marriage had been handed over, Henriette presented fresh demands, suggested, said she, by her father. What these demands were is not quite clear, but there is every reason to believe that M. d'Entragues was endeavouring to obtain the bâton of a marshal of France as ransom for his daughter's shame.[2] Henri IV., however, was too careful of the honour of his army to prostitute it thus.

"You command me," writes he to Henriette, "to surmount, if I love you, all the difficulties in the way of our happiness which may arise. I have shown sufficiently the strength of my love in the propositions which I have made, for your relatives, on their side, not to raise further difficulties. What I have said before you, I shall not fail in, but I shall do nothing more."

Without paying any attention to this letter, Entragues came to Fontainebleau and demanded audience of the

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[1] "Lettres-Missives," Letters of October 5 and 7.

[2] The Comte d'Auvergne had already obtained a handsome pension to secure his complaisance.

King. Pressed by the latter to explain exactly what he wanted, he pretended that he was unable to speak freely except in the presence of his confidential man of business, a person named Nau, and the conversation was accordingly adjourned until the morrow. On leaving the château, Entragues remarked to some of his friends, in a tone loud enough to be overheard by those standing by: "I see plainly that the King and my daughter are in accord to deceive me." His words were immediately reported to the King, who writes to Henriette: "He (Entragues) said to those whom he thinks his friends that all that I say to him is with the intention of deceiving him, and that you are consenting to this design. For myself, I am not offended by this speech, but it does you wrong."

Next day, neither Entragues nor Nau appeared at the hour appointed, to the great annoyance of the King, who informs Henriette that, after waiting two hours, he has sent to find M. d'Entragues and that he will "neither eat nor drink until he has settled matters with him." However, that gentleman had apparently returned to Bois-Malesherbes.

It was now Henriette's turn to raise difficulties. She pretended to be jealous and reproached the King with his *amourette* with Mlle. de la Châtre, who had recently arrived at Fontainebleau. Henri hastened to sacrifice the poor lady to her resentment.

"I have pronounced sentence on the belle," he writes. "So soon as her horses are ready, she will go. This has not been done without tears and the greatest oaths imaginable."

A sudden indisposition interrupted for a few days the King's visits to Bois-Malesherbes.

"If my illness had continued," writes he to Henriette, "I would have sent to fetch you. I am so sad at not seeing you that nothing is able to content me. Love me very dearly, for I cherish you more than I ever did."

The lady's response, however, was decidedly cold; she even appears to have insinuated that his Majesty was less ill than he represented himself to be. The gallant's rejoinder was piteous. "Assuredly I have not deserved this of you," he writes.

Henriette hastened to make amends, assured the King of her affection, and told him cynically that her father was prepared to come to terms with him. The King, however, declared that he wished to have nothing more to do with M. d'Entragues, but to arrange matters with her alone. And, without doubt in the hope of finally deciding her, he informed her that "the money to purchase her an estate was all ready."

On October 14, Entragues came to Fontainebleau and informed the King that he had decided to consent to all his wishes. His Majesty could not contain his delight, and wrote to Henriette that "the joy which he felt was such that it could not be expressed in writing," but that "he would show it her on the morrow." And he retired to rest to dream of a great happiness.

But, early the following morning, Entragues again presented himself, and, to the monarch's intense chagrin, informed him that it would be useless for him to go to Bois-Malesherbes. His daughter was no longer there.

It was true. The evening before he had taken Henriette and her mother to the Château of Marcoussis, a veritable fortress defended by three drawbridges, which in time past had sustained more than one siege.

Certain historians are inclined to see in this a move prompted by remorse on the part of Entragues, who was recoiling at the last moment from the dishonour which was about to be inflicted on his name. We confess we cannot agree with them. Entragues's whole career shows him to have been a greedy, crafty, unscrupulous rogue, and it seems far more probable that he hoped, by keeping his daughter from the arms of the King a little longer, to extract from the latter's impatience the coveted bâton of marshal or some other advantage.

Whatever his real motive may have been is, however, of little interest, since at this juncture Madame d'Entragues intervened. Believing that she had only to stretch out her hand to seize the crown matrimonial of France and place it on her daughter's head, she sent secretly to advise the King to give Entragues an order which would remove him momentarily from Marcoussis. The order was promptly given, and, so soon as the Cerberus had departed, the wolf was introduced into the sheepfold. A few days later his Majesty returned to Paris, bringing his new conquest with him, and installed her in the Hôtel de Larchant, near the Louvre, which some time before he had caused to be prepared for her reception and furnished most sumptuously. "Such a bird deserves a fine cage," said he.

CHAPTER IV

The new romance not untroubled by storms—Henriette becomes enceinte, to the great alarm of the King's Ministers—Her pilgrimage to Notre-Dame-de-Cléry—Visit of Charles Emmanuel, Duke of Savoy, to the Court of France—He gains the friendship of the favourite by his presents and attentions—He succeeds in seducing the Maréchal de Biron from his allegiance to his sovereign—Completion of the negotiations for the marriage of Henri IV. with Marie de' Medici—Fury of Henriette on learning the news—Terrible scene between her and the King—Henri IV. writes to his mistress and the Comte d'Entragues demanding the return of the promise of marriage which he has given the lady—But both father and daughter maintain an obstinate silence—Temporary reconciliation—Henriette is created Marquise de Verneuil—She gives birth to a stillborn child—Her despair—Departure of the King for Lyons—War between France and Savoy—Letters of Henri IV. to Marie de' Medici—Madame de Verneuil sets out to join him—She is received by the citizens of Lyons as though she had been Queen—Letter of the King to her—Their meeting at Saint-André-de-la-Côte—Quarrel and reconciliation—Madame de Verneuil accompanies the King to Grenoble—She returns hurriedly to Paris in a paroxysm of rage, on learning of the approaching arrival of Marie de' Medici—Henri IV. follows her and is treated to another violent scene—He leaves Paris in anger—The favourite, recognizing that she has gone too far, writes him a humble and tender letter, and is forgiven—Peace between France and Savoy.

THE honeymoon past, Henri IV. appears to have been no more faithful to his new favourite than he had been to her predecessors. But the gallantries in which he indulged were but passing caprices, and he returned always to this captivating creature, whose lively disposition and witty and caustic tongue possessed for him almost as great an attraction as her physical charms. It is true that the *ménage* was not untroubled by storms, since Henriette was decidedly jealous and did not mince her language when she had reason to suspect her royal lover of some infidelity, and sometimes the latter found her reproaches a little hard to endure and was tempted to repent of his bargain. But then the young lady could be quite irresistible when she had a mind to be, and, so soon as she recognized that she was going too far, she changed her tactics, became tender and caressing, and never failed to wheedle the amorous monarch back into a good humour. Besides, relying on the written promise she had extracted from the King, she ardently desired a son, and intended to leave as little as possible to chance. If she offended the Béarnais, and his visits to her were to become less frequent, her desire might not be realized within the specified time.

Finally, towards the end of that year, Henriette became enceinte, to her own intense satisfaction, but to the great alarm of the King's Ministers, who foresaw the most embarrassing complications if the mistress were to bear a son. They had feared the elevation to the throne of Gabrielle d'Estrées too much to approve of that of Henriette, and even if so scandalous a marriage were avoided, it would hardly be possible for the King, so long as the promise he had given the lady remained in her possession, to wed a foreign princess. As for Henriette, so far from concealing it, she paraded impudently this pregnancy, of which the prize was a crown, and made a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame-de-Cléry, one of the most famous sanctuaries of the Orléanais, and presented it with a silver child as a votive offering.

In 1588, Charles Emmanuel, Duke of Savoy, profiting by the civil troubles in France, had occupied the marquisate of Saluzzo, annexed to France by the Treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis. Called upon by Henri III. to withdraw his troops, he had replied that it was necessary to keep them there in order to prevent the Huguenots of Dauphiné from seizing the country, and the King was obliged to accept this explanation. All the time that he was grappling with Philip II., Henri IV. did not feel strong enough to compel the Duke to evacuate Saluzzo, and matters remained in the same state until the Peace of Vervins in 1598. Once, however, delivered from this implacable enemy, the King was free to deal with Charles Emmanuel, who proposed that the affair should be submitted to the arbitration of the Pope, and, this being refused, offered to come to the Court of France, under the pretext of treating in person, but really for the purpose of intriguing more at his ease.

" Let him come," remarked the Béarnais contemptuously, " but let him not hope to be rid of the business for a visit and a few compliments."

On December 13, 1599, the Duke arrived at Fontainebleau, accompanied by a brilliant escort, and followed by wagons containing many costly gifts and some 500,000 crowns, by means of which he hoped to secure such support among the King's advisers that he would be allowed to keep his acquisition on easy terms.

A week later, having shown his guest all the marvels of the royal residence, and organized in his honour several hunting-parties in the forest, the King conducted him to Paris. Apartments had been prepared for Charles Emmanuel at the Louvre, but he preferred to lodge with the Duc de Nemours, who was his near relative. Secret interviews with important persons would, of course, be much easier to arrange at the Hôtel de Nemours than at the Louvre.

Serious affairs were at first laid aside, and entertainments of all kinds, tilting matches, tournaments, banquets, plays by the Italian comedians, succeeded one another without cessation. Ballets were then the mode, and all the most handsome men and prettiest women at the Court took part in them. Etiquette with a bachelor King—or, at any rate, with one who conducted himself as such—was far from severe, and gallantry reigned supreme. The *escadron volant* of Catherine de' Medici had long since retired from active service, but a new generation of young and charming women had arrived to take its place, and the Duke of Savoy had abundant opportunities, if he had been inclined to take them, of enhancing a reputation for gallantry which had preceded him across the Alps.[1] Short, slight and terribly round-shouldered, "he atoned for his physical deformity by all the intelligence that one ascribes charitably to hunchbacks."[2] With his fine dark eyes, of which the shrewdness softened the boldness, and his broad and high forehead, which his hair carefully brushed back made higher still, "he appeared a great prince beside a great King."

On New Year's Day Charles Emmanuel emptied his wagons of the treasures they contained, and made splendid presents to the King[3] and the principal nobles and ladies of the Court, or at least to all those whom he judged might be of service to him. That reserved for Henriette d'Entragues was particularly magnificent and consisted of "pearls, diamonds and other precious stones," since the Duke had decided that he was likely to find in her a valuable ally, if not at the moment, then at some future time. Won over to his interests by this munificent gift, the favourite ventured to speak to the King of the pretended rights of Savoy to the marquisate of Saluzzo. But, weak as was Henri IV. where his mistresses were concerned, to his credit it must be recorded that he seldom tolerated their interference in affairs of State, and at the very first hint which she let fall, he rebuked her so sharply that she had no desire to return to the subject.

But while seeking to make use of the favourite, Charles Emmanuel strove to corrupt the chief nobles of the King's entourage. Although he was scarcely thirty-two, he was already an adept in intrigue, and he had not failed to notice the restless discontent of some of those who had fought on the King's side against the League.

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[1] The number of his mistresses and of the children he had had by them was reported to equal, if not to exceed, that of Henri IV., a statement which we find somewhat difficult to believe.

[2] La Ferrière.

[3] He offered Henri IV. two vases of rock crystal which had come to him from his ancestress Beatrix of Portugal, a present which was ironically compared to the fragility of his promises.

They contrasted their rewards with the favours obtained by their former adversaries and complained bitterly of their master's ingratitude. Their importance had, they felt, depended on the war, and was likely to diminish in proportion as the country became more settled and the authority of the Crown more firmly established.

The most prominent of these malcontents was the Maréchal de Biron. Like his father, the old Maréchal de Biron, who had died during the siege of Épernay in 1592, Biron was a brave and capable soldier and had rendered great service to the King's cause, but, like him, he was inordinately vain and ambitious and entertained the most extravagant opinion of his deserts. Whatever cause of complaint others of Henri IV.'s old companions-in-arms might have had, Biron certainly seems to have had none, since the King had conferred upon him a marshal's bâton, created him duke and peer of France, and appointed him to the lucrative and important post of Governor of Burgundy. But no rewards appeared adequate to a man who was wont to boast that his own and his father's services had given the King his crown and was, besides, an inveterate gambler and spendthrift and perpetually in need of money, and he made no secret of his disgust that he was not all-powerful at Court.[1]

On the road from Orléans to Fontainebleau, the Duke had had a first conversation with Biron, and had made such good use of the occasion that he had already succeeded in partially winning him over. Henri IV. furnished him with the means to complete the work he had begun. With a prince so astute, the monarch ought to have been on his guard, but, in the course of their conversation, he had the imprudence to respond to some amorous confidences of his guest by others more compromising, and to complain of the ungovernable temper of Biron, his ingratitude and his excessive vanity, even going so far as to accuse him of not being really brave, except when he was fighting under his sovereign's eyes.[1] Charles Emmanuel duly repeated these unfortunate words to the marshal, who was beside himself with indignation, and when he judged that he was ripe for treason, he flattered his pride and his ambition by offering him the independent sovereignty of Burgundy and the hand of his third daughter, and soon had him fairly in his toils.

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[1] P. F. Willert, "Henry of Navarre."

The interview between the Duke and Biron did not escape the watchful eyes of Sully and Villeroy, and, to escape this surveillance, the two conspirators arranged to communicate in future through the agency of one Jacques de la Fin, who was to go each night from one hôtel to the other. This La Fin, who had formerly been in the service of the Duc d'Anjou and afterwards in that of Henri de Lorraine, Duc de Guise, was an adventurer and charlatan, who had gained the confidence of Biron by his pretended skill in alchemy, astrology and magic, in which sciences the marshal was a devout believer. The Comte d'Auvergne and the Duc de Bouillon associated themselves in their intrigues, and, as for Henriette d'Entragues, they did not doubt that they would be able to count on her in the event of her matrimonial pretensions not being realized. For Biron had, from the first, encouraged these, and had thus succeeded in ingratiating himself with the favourite, while Charles Emmanuel had paid her the most assiduous court.

At the end of February, Henri IV. caused the Duke of Savoy to be informed that he was prepared to cede to him the marquisate of Saluzzo, in consideration of receiving in exchange Bresse, Valromey and the district of Gex—the whole frontier of the Rhône, in fact. After vainly endeavouring to secure more favourable terms, the Duke pretended to accept this ultimatum, and on May 7 he quitted Paris, the French Government having granted him a delay of three months, in order that he might take the advice of his Ministers.

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[1] Henri IV., says Saint-Simon, was jealous of the military reputation of Biron, "jealous of his valour and of his ability."

Shortly before the arrival of the Duke of Savoy in France, an Ambassador from Tuscany, Baccio Giovannini, had come to treat officially of the marriage of the King with Marie de' Medici. But, aware that Charles Emmanuel was endeavouring by every means in his power to hinder the project, Henri's Ministers deemed it prudent to defer the negotiations until this inconvenient guest had taken his departure. So soon, however, as he had crossed the frontier, the negotiations began, and, not a little to Giovannini's surprise, Sully and Villeroy, on behalf of their master, made scarcely any difficulty about accepting the dowry which the Grand Duke of Tuscany had authorized him to propose,[1] and exchanged with him a definite promise. The fact is, that the two Ministers did not, in view of the great interests which attached to the marriage of the King, consider it politic to defer the matter any longer for the sake of a few hundred thousand crowns.

The same day Sully proceeded to the Louvre.

" Whence do you come ? " demanded the King.

" Sire, I come from marrying you."

" Marrying me ? "

The King placed his elbows on the table and his head in his hands and remained thus for some time, lost in thought. Then he said :

" Ah well, let it be so, since the interest of the State requires it of me as a duty."

Mlle. d'Entragues was speedily warned of what had occurred—Sully, who detested her, no doubt saw to that—and a terrible scene took place between her and the King. Beside herself with fury, the young woman flung aside the mask and revealed for the first time her detestable character. Upon the head of the lover who had deceived her she poured a veritable hail of bitter reproaches and gross abuse. Then, having exhausted all her vocabulary of invective, she passed from insults to threats, swearing to make use of that promise of marriage which the King had dared to treat as a worthless scrap of paper.

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[1] This was 600,000 crowns. Henri IV. had originally demanded 1,500,000. Sully is said to have received a present of 10,000 crowns for his complaisance in not demanding more.

Henri IV. endeavoured to reason with her, and assured her that, though his decision, dictated by the gravest reasons of State, was irrevocable, he still loved her. But his efforts were useless and served only to provoke a fresh explosion of wrath, before which his Majesty retreated, with an unmoved countenance, but, nevertheless, wounded to the quick, for Henriette had known only too well where to plant her blows. Returned to his apartments, the indignant monarch snatched up a pen and wrote to his mistress the following caustic letter :

" Mademoiselle,—Love, honour and the benefits which you have received from me would have arrested the most frivolous soul in the world, if it had not been accompanied by an evil disposition such as yours. I shall not reproach you further, though I can and ought to do so, as you are aware. I beg you to send me back the promise you know of, and do not give me the trouble of recovering it by other means. Return to me also the ring which I sent you the other day.[1] That is the reason of this letter, to which I desire an answer to-night."

At the same time, the King wrote to the Comte d'Entragues, in whose possession he believed the promise of marriage to be, a letter in which he likewise demanded the return of that document, though in terms less abrupt than he had addressed to Henriette. He added that, if he brought it back, he would explain to him his reasons, which were " domestic and not of State," and concluded by assuring him that he was " a good master," a hint that his obedience would not fail of substantial recognition. But both father and daughter maintained an obstinate silence, to the great embarrassment of the King, who, in view of his marriage with Marie de' Medici, was most anxious to come to some arrangement with Henriette and her parents, and began to fear that it was their intention to make a scandal.

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[1] This ring was perhaps the same which, L'Estoile tells us, the King had bought from a jeweller on the Pont-au-Change, to whom he had remarked before paying for it : " Let me examine it again. Quite recently I had sold to me a piece of merchandise which was not worth half of what I gave for it." According to the chronicler, the piece of merchandise in question was Mlle. d'Entragues.

It was Madame d'Entragues who came to his relief. More prudent than Henriette—had she not herself passed through similar crises in the time of Charles IX. ?—she made her daughter understand that she was taking the wrong road, that nothing was yet desperate, and that, in any case, she ought to make a virtue of resignation. Henriette surrendered to these sage counsels, and the result was a reconciliation, temporary at least, between her and Henri IV., of which the pledge was the grant of the estate of Verneuil, in Normandy, erected into a marquisate in her favour. From that day Henriette de Balzac d'Entragues bore the title of Marquise de Verneuil.

At the end of May an Ambassador from the Duke of Savoy arrived in Paris ; but he brought only evasive replies from his master, who was merely seeking to gain time. Weary of these delays, the King determined to have recourse to arms if the obstinacy of Charles Emmanuel continued, and left for Fontainebleau, with the intention of proceeding to Lyons, where the expedition against Savoy would be organized. The Marquise de Verneuil followed him. " The tigress had sheathed her claws and become tender and caressing," [1] and, retained by the spell which she knew so well how to cast over him, despite the pressing letters of Sully, who had preceded him to Lyons, the amorous monarch postponed his departure from day to day.

Henriette had entered into her seventh month of pregnancy. If she were to give birth to a son, the King would find himself fatally trapped between the promise which he had made to marry her—the promise which the marchioness had declined to restore to him—and the definite engagement to wed Marie de' Medici, which Sillery, in his name, had just signed at Florence.

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[1] La Ferrière.

Happily for him, the heavens came to his aid.

Summer had arrived early that year ; from the first days of June the heat was intense. One day, Henriette, feeling tired, had remained in bed, the windows of her chamber being left wide open. Towards evening a violent thunderstorm came on, and a thunderbolt entered the room and passed under her bed. So great was the shock she experienced that she was forthwith seized by the pains of childbirth, and a few hours later was delivered of a boy, who, however, died almost immediately.[1]

Henriette's despair at the destruction of all her hopes was so violent that the King believed himself unable to leave her at such a moment, and, though rejoiced without doubt at this unforeseen dénouement, made some attempt to console her. The favourite's strong constitution, however, soon asserted itself, and on June 26, Henri IV., yielding to the pressing instances of Sully, set out for Lyons. But it was not until July 9 that he arrived there, for at Moulins he met again the fascinating Marie de la Bourdaisière,[2] who had followed her royal mistress Louise of Lorraine to that town, and " wasted in her arms more than a week."

Deputies from the Duke of Savoy had preceded him to Lyons, but nothing came of the ensuing conference, since Charles Emmanuel was prepared to surrender neither Saluzzo nor the equivalent demanded by France ; and on August 12, the King, at the end of his patience, declared war. The following day, Biron, forced to obey, invaded the Bresse, while Lesdiguières entered Savoy.

From Lyons the King carried on an active correspondence with Marie de' Medici, upon whom he lavished compliments and assurances of affection.

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[1] Some historians state that the child was born dead, but this is incorrect. He lived just long enough to be baptized by the Superior of the Mathurins of Fontainebleau, whom the King had hurriedly sent for.

[2] See page 47 *supra.*

"My beautiful mistress," he writes to her under date August 23, in accrediting to her the Duc de Bellegarde, "I send my Grand Equerry to you, with all the procurations necessary to complete our marriage. He has so much the more desired this journey, since he knew that he could never do anything more agreeable to me or more useful for the good of the Kingdom."

The next day, in thanking her for a present which she has sent him, he again assures her of his affection and begs her to hasten her coming, "in order that she may behold the proofs of it."

Then on September 3 we find him writing as follows:

"Hasten your journey as much as possible. If it were seemly for a man to say that he was enamoured of his wife, I should tell you that I am extremely enamoured of you. But I prefer to prove it to you in a place where there will be no witnesses save you and myself. Good-day, my mistress, I conclude by kissing your beautiful hands a hundred thousand times."

Finally, on September 30, in recommending her to place every confidence in her future *dame d'honneur*, Madame de Guercheville, he "kisses her beautiful mouth a hundred thousand times."[1]

After this, we might be tempted to believe that the Vert-Galant was really enamoured of his future consort, were it not that this same pen, so prodigal of tender expressions, had just written to the Marquise de Verneuil inviting her to rejoin him.

Henriette, resolved to struggle against an unkind Fate and to follow the King up to the end, up to the very border of the nuptial couch, at once took the road for Lyons, which she entered on October 20, in an open litter. The complaisant citizens of Lyons received her as though she had been Queen, just as their fathers had received Diane de Poitiers half a century earlier, and the Provost of the Merchants and the sheriffs came to the gate of the Faubourg de Vaise to compliment her. In return, the marchioness presented them with four captured standards, which Henri IV. had sent her, and begged them to deposit them in one of the chapels of the cathedral.

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[1] "Lettres-Missives," t. V.

At Lyons Henriette found a letter from the King awaiting her.

"My dear heart," he wrote, "I set out so early in the morning to reconnoitre the passes of which I told you that the satisfaction of learning your news was delayed until this moment, when I returned to find your lackey arrived. I have kissed your letter a thousand times, in default of being able to kiss you. . . . During my journey we have not only seen the snow, we have been covered with it for three hours, and it was as thick as it is in France in January. I leave to-morrow, and I hope to be so near you on Friday that I shall claim from you the promise which you made me when we parted, if I arrive without baggage. Good-night, heart of mine; I kiss thee and kiss thee again."

It was at Saint-André-de-la-Côte, on the road from Grenoble to Vienne, that Henri IV. had arranged to meet his mistress. He left Grenoble on horseback, accompanied only by Bassompierre and an equerry, and rode the whole way at a trot, with the result that, when they reached their destination, Bassompierre, less accustomed to the saddle than his royal master, was so tired that he could scarcely stand. After a separation of four months, his Majesty naturally expected to be welcomed with open arms, but a very different reception awaited him. Some friend had charitably informed Henriette of the King's infidelity with Mlle. de Bourdaisière, and, although in Henri IV. she loved only the monarch, and cared not a jot for the man, her vanity was none the less deeply wounded. To be sacrificed to a queen for reasons of State was hard enough to endure; but to be supplanted, even momentarily, by a rival whom she despised—this chit of a maid-of-honour—was intolerable.

And she made the King feel the full brunt of her indignation.

Henri, angered by a reception so different from what he had expected, retaliated,[1] and then, turning abruptly to Bassompierre, bade him go and have their horses saddled. But Bassompierre, perhaps secretly in accord with the marchioness, smilingly protested.

" I will willingly order yours to be saddled, Sire," said he, " but, as for me, I declare myself on the side of Madame de Verneuil, and shall remain with her."

The King, though a little surprised at this intervention, took it in good part, and, writes Bassompierre, " after going to and fro several times in order to reconcile two persons who were well inclined to it, I made peace between them, and we slept at Saint-André."[2]

The next day Henri IV., accompanied by Madame de Verneuil, returned to Grenoble, where they remained a week. The King's marriage with Marie de' Medici had been celebrated by proxy at Florence on October 3, and the new Queen was already on her way to France. Nevertheless, Henriette desired to resume her place as though nothing had happened, and on the arrival of the Legate, Cardinal Aldobrandini, nephew of Clement VIII., who had performed the marriage at Florence, and had come to mediate between France and Savoy, the King experienced all the difficulty in the world in persuading her that decorum demanded that he should, momentarily at least, send away his mistress. Finally, she consented to start alone for Lyons, and his Majesty, greatly relieved, set out for Chambéry to receive the Legate.

From Lyons, the municipal authorities had sent a luxuriously-furnished barge. The favourite embarked on Lac Bourget, and, descending the Rhône, reached Lyons, where another most flattering reception awaited

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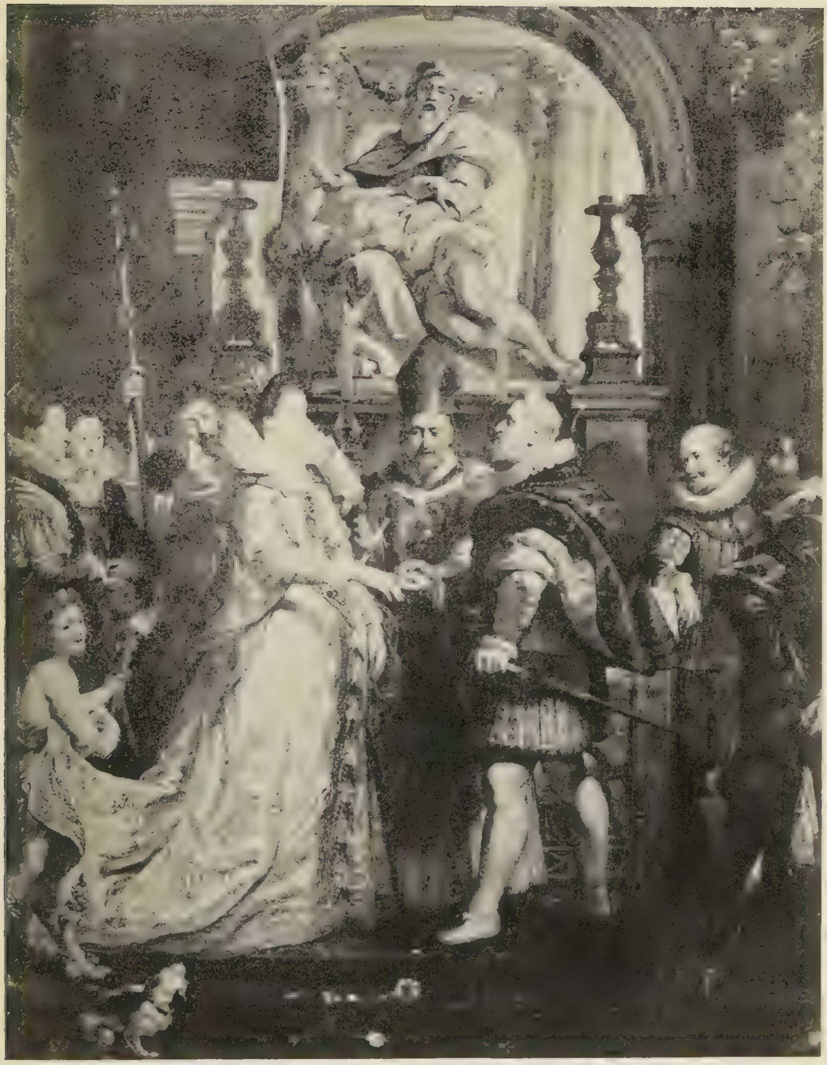
[1] " Mémoires."

[2] In the perpetual quarrels between the lovers, the Béarnais sometimes gave as shrewd thrusts as he received. One day, L'Estoile tells us, Henriette inquired of the King when " his banker's daughter " (Marie de' Medici) was to arrive. " As soon," he replied, " as I have banished all the loose women from my Court."



Marriage by proxy of Marie de' Medici.
After the painting by Rubens.

[*To face p.* 68.

her. Henri IV. had intended her to remain until he was able to rejoin her, but, on learning of the approaching arrival of Marie de' Medici, she was seized with a new paroxysm of rage and hurriedly returned to Paris. The King, on being informed of her departure, posted after her to the capital, only to be treated to a repetition of the unpleasant scene of six months earlier, when Henriette had learned that the Italian marriage had been definitely arranged. Indeed, the violence of the lady's language would appear to have excelled even that which she had employed on the previous occasion. Anyway, it proved a little too much for the King, who, after a half-hearted attempt to pacify the infuriated sultana, left both her and Paris.

Scarcely had he taken his departure than Henriette realized that she had allowed her uncontrollable temper to carry her too far, and that, since there are limits to the forbearance of even the most infatuated of lovers, the consequences to herself might be unpleasant. For, though she had doubtless informed his Majesty in the most implicit manner that she scorned him and all the benefits that were in his power to confer, she had not the smallest desire to be taken at her word. Failing the crown matrimonial, now definitely lost to her, the position of mistress offered substantial advantages, not the least of which in her eyes were the opportunities which it would afford of making mischief in the royal *ménage,* and in this way avenging her blighted ambitions. Accordingly, she took up a pen and proceeded to address to Henri IV. the following letter, which, at once respectful and tender, she judged would go straight to the heart of a man who believed himself always and in spite of all loved for himself.

"I am reduced," she writes, "to the calamity which a great happiness has of late caused me to fear. It is necessary that I avow that this fear was attributable to knowledge of myself, since the great difference between your rank and mine was menacing me with the change which precipitates me from the heaven to which you had raised me to the earth where you found me. My felicity depended more upon you than on the power of destiny, to which I shall not ascribe the blame for my affliction, since it pleases you that it should be the price of the public joy which your marriage brings to France, an affliction, in truth, which I am constrained to avow, not because you ought not to fulfil the desire of your subjects, but because your nuptials are the obsequies of my life, and subject me to the power of a cruel discretion, which banishes me from your royal presence and from your heart, in order that I may not be henceforth insulted by the disdainful glances of those who have seen me occupying a place in your good graces, since I prefer to sigh at liberty in my solitude than to breathe with fear in good company. It is either a humour which your generosity has nourished, or a courage with which you have inspired me, which, since I have not learned to humiliate myself before misfortunes, does not permit me to return to my first condition. I do not speak to you except by sighs ; for, as regards my secret complaints, your Majesty is able secretly to understand my thought, since you know my mind as well as my body. In my miserable exile, there remains to me nothing save only the glory of having been loved by the greatest monarch of the earth ; by a King who has been willing to stoop so far as to give the name of mistress to his servant and subject ; by a King who recognizes only that of Heaven, and who has no equal here below. Bear in mind, Sire, a demoiselle whom you possess and what she owes you naturally, which she cannot do except in your faith only, which has as much power over me as your Royal Majesty has over the life of your very humble servant and subject."

This letter did not fail to produce the effect which the writer anticipated, as Henri IV. had no desire to get rid of her ; all he wanted was to recover his promise of marriage. She remained, accordingly, his acknowledged favourite and even accompanied him on a new expedition against Savoy. But Charles Emmanuel had decided that it was more prudent to negotiate than to fight any longer, and was fortunate enough to persuade the King to accept a war indemnity of 80,000 crowns, with the district of Bresse and other territory on the western side of the Alps, forming the modern department of the Ain, in return for being allowed to retain Saluzzo.

Without waiting for the treaty to be signed, Henri IV. returned to Paris, and then set out southwards to meet his Queen.

CHAPTER V

Journey of Marie de' Medici to France—Her reception at Marseilles—Her arrival at Lyons—First meeting with Henri IV.—" I have been deceived ; she is not beautiful ! "—Personal appearance of the new Queen—Her unattractive character—On the pretext that his presence is needed in the North, the King leaves his consort and spends a week with Henriette at Verneuil—Marie de' Medici makes her entry into Paris—Presentation of Madame de Verneuil to the Queen—Singular behaviour of Henri IV. on this occasion—Marie de' Medici begins to treat the favourite with marked coldness—The Queen's Italian favourites, Leonora Galigaï and Concini—In order to placate her Majesty, Madame de Verneuil obtains for Leonora the post of *dame d'atours*, and for a time is well received by the Queen—Henri IV. installs his mistress at the Hôtel de la Force, close to the Louvre—Jealousy of Marie de' Medici, who complains bitterly of the affront which he has put upon her—Madame de Verneuil retaliates by turning the Queen into ridicule—Curious picture of the interior of the Louvre at this moment—The domestic situation aggravated by both ladies becoming enceinte almost simultaneously—On the promise of Leonora Galigaï and Concini to bring the Queen to a more reasonable frame of mind, Madame de Verneuil persuades Henri IV. to consent to their marriage—Gratitude of the Queen : her attentions to the favourite—Henriette retires to Verneuil for her approaching confinement—Visit of the King to her—The Maréchal de Biron and Queen Elizabeth—Birth of a Dauphin—Henri IV. cannot refrain from expressing his delight to Henriette—Resentment of the latter—Remonstrances of the King—Birth of a son to Madame de Verneuil.

ON October 13, 1599, Marie de' Medici left Florence, and on the 17th, accompanied by the Grand Duchess of Tuscany, her aunt, and the Grand Duchess of Mantua, her sister, she sailed from Leghorn in a galley of the Grand Duke of Tuscany, " one of the most beautiful and the most rich which had ever appeared upon the sea," inlaid without with ivory, ebony, mother-of-pearl and lapis lazuli, and hung within with silk brocade and cloth of gold, sewn with fleurs-de-lis in diamonds. Ten galleys of the Pope, six of the Grand Duke and five of Malta escorted this luxurious vessel, which, owing to stress of weather, was obliged to seek shelter in Porto Finale, on the Ligurian coast, and to remain there for more than a week. The courtier-poet Malherbe attributed this delay to the gallantry of Neptune, who desired to contemplate her Majesty's charms as long as possible.

On November 3, the new Queen arrived at Marseilles, where she was received by the Chancellor, Pomponne de Bellièvre, the Connétable de Montmorency, the Ducs de Nemours, de Ventadour and de Guise, the Cardinals de Joyeuse, de Gondi, de Givry and de Sourdis, and a number of princesses and great ladies. "From the port to the palace where she was to lodge a gallery had been erected. On leaving her galley, she ascended to this gallery, where the Chancellor awaited her and acquainted her with the orders which he had received from the King. The consuls of the town, accompanied by the citizens, presented her on their knees with two golden keys of the place, linked together with the same metal; after which she was conducted under a very rich canopy to the palace, having about her the cardinals and several bishops. On Saturday, November 4, the Chancellor, the members of the Council, the *maîtres des requêtes* and the chief officers of the Chancellery, proceeded, together with the members of the Parlement of Provence, to the reception-room of her lodging to salute her. On Sunday the principal ladies of the town had the honour to enter her chamber at her rising and to assist at her Mass."

On the 16th, Marie de' Medici left Marseilles, escorted by two thousand horse, and the following day made her entry into the Papal city of Avignon, where splendid fêtes were given in her honour. Finally, on December 2, she reached Lyons, where Henri IV. was to join her.

But the King had not yet arrived. Far from anxious to make the acquaintance of his wife, notwithstanding the amorous tone of his letters,[1] and retained perhaps by Henriette, whose malice had here a fine opportunity of exercising itself, it was not until the 9th, at eight o'clock in the evening, that he reached Lyons. An hour later, while the Queen was at supper, he entered the room without being announced, in the hope that, amidst the crowd of gentlemen servants and other people, he would be able to contemplate her at his leisure without being recognized. But his arrival created such a stir that Marie divined that the King was present. She rose from table almost immediately and returned to her apartments; whither he followed her, although he was still in travelling dress. As he entered, she wished to throw herself at his feet, but he raised her up and embraced her twice. After remaining with her for half an hour, he retired to sup, and, when he had finished, sent the Duchesse de Nemours to the Queen.[1]

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[1] On December 2—the day the Queen reached Lyons—Henri IV. wrote to her: "Thursday I shall start, and shall be with you Saturday. I have had two attacks of fever; the sight of you will cure me."—"Lettres-Missives," t. V.

"Madame," said she, "the King is without a bed; he prays your Majesty to allow him to share yours."

"I am not come," answered the Queen, "save to obey his will, as his most humble servant."

Permission having been thus obtained, the Vert-Galant entered the Queen's chamber. Marie was already in bed.

"I understand," said he, smiling, "that you are lending me the half of your bed, since I have not brought mine."

"The princesses and other ladies," remarks a naïve contemporary chronicler, "retired to permit of the consummation of the marriage."[2]

"I have been deceived; she is not beautiful!" remarked Henri IV. to one of his confidants on first seeing his wife. It was but too true. To reconcile him to the marriage, his Ministers had shown him a highly flattering portrait of the Florentine princess which had been painted seven years before, when she was only twenty. After having duped so many others, the Béarnais had been duped himself.

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[1] The Duchesse de Nemours had been appointed Surintendante of the Queen's Household.

[2] Péricaud, "Notes sur Lyon," cited by La Ferrière.

By no stretch of imagination could Marie de' Medici be called beautiful or even attractive. She had, it must be admitted, a good complexion, shapely arms and a fine bosom, which it pleased her to display liberally. But her forehead was heavy, her nose coarse, her mouth sensual, and her big dark eyes wanting in expression; while a full and rather ponderous figure made her look considerably older than her twenty-seven years. "She had rather the appearance of a stout bourgeoise than of a queen."

Nor, unfortunately, were the qualities of her mind calculated to atone for her lack of physical attractions. She had none of the intelligence of her celebrated kinswoman, Catherine de' Medici, none of that suppleness, that charm of manner, by which the latter had so often contrived to disarm her enemies. She was dull and seldom showed any animation, except when something happened to displease her, while her manners were brusque, almost to the point of rudeness. What was worse, her temper was obstinate and even shrewish, and she had already given proof of a spiteful and ungenerous disposition by condescending to mutilate the magnificent marble tomb of the Pazzi, the exiled enemies of the House of Medici, in the church of the Celestins at Lyons. Finally, she was cold, and appears to have made little or no effort to please her husband, who could not fail to compare her, very much to her disadvantage, with the sprightly Henriette, who, with all her faults, was worth as a woman, and particularly as a sweetheart, ten times at least the legitimate spouse. "Marie de' Medici was only the reason of State, gruff even when she wished to be amiable; the other was the caprice, the joy of youth, with her slender, elastic, vigorous body; she was passion without restraint and without reserve, love with all its transports and its follies."[1]

Henri IV. remained six weeks at Lyons to await the conclusion of peace with Savoy. The treaty was signed on January 20, 1600, and the following day, on the pretext that his presence was needed in the North, but that the health of the Queen must not be endangered by a hurried journey, the King took leave of his consort and travelled post to Fontainebleau and thence to Verneuil, to throw himself into the arms of his mistress. His visit lasted a week, and from it dated a second pregnancy, which was to furnish new weapons to the implacable ambition of the favourite.

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[1] M. Charles Merki, "La Marquise de Verneuil et la mort d'Henri IV."

A day or two after the King's departure, Marie de' Medici left Lyons with all her Court and travelled by easy stages to Nemours, where she was met by her husband, who conducted her to Fontainebleau. There they remained for some days and then proceeded to Paris.

The Queen made her entry into the capital on February 9, borne in a magnificent litter, in which sat the young César de Vendôme, one of Henri IV.'s sons by Gabrielle d'Estrées. As her apartments at the Louvre were not yet ready for her reception, she accepted the hospitality of Jérome de Gondi, introducer of the Ambassadors, who had been appointed her *chevalier d'honneur*, at his hôtel in the Rue de Condé on the left bank of the Seine.[1]

The difficulties of the domestic situation which everyone, except perhaps Henri IV. himself, had, of course, foreseen, began forthwith.

During the week which the King had spent at Verneuil, Henriette had extracted from him the promise that she should be presented to the Queen, on the very day even of the latter's arrival in Paris, in order apparently to forestall the influences which might oppose her desire. Diane de France, Duchesse d'Angoulême, to whom his Majesty first addressed himself, accepted this disagreeable duty, but, at the last moment, excused herself on the plea of illness, and he was forced to have recourse to the Duchesse de Nemours. This lady was under obligations to the King, since it was in response to her entreaties that he had pardoned Joinville for his ruffianly attack upon Bellegarde in the courtyard of Zamet's hotel.[1] Nevertheless, so indignant was she at what was demanded of her, that she ventured to raise objections. But Henri IV. commanded her angrily to execute his orders, and she had to obey.

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[1] There was at this period another Hôtel de Gondi, in the Rue Saint-Honoré, which was the residence of the aged Albert de Gondi, Duc de Retz, one of the instigators of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew.

With obvious embarrassment, the unfortunate Madame de Nemours presented Henriette to the Queen, who is said never to have forgiven her for having made this presentation. As the favourite came forward, the King appeared to think it incumbent upon him to explain who she was.

" Mademoiselle is my mistress," said he, turning with an ingratiating smile to his astonished consort. " She will be your very obedient and very submissive servant."

Marie remained silent and impassive, while Henriette executed a curtsey so scanty as to hold out little hope of the fulfilment of the King's promise. Upon which his Majesty, placing his hand on her head, forced her to kneel and to kiss the hem of her sovereign's dress.[2]

It must be admitted that Henri IV. had so contrived the introduction of the rivals as to exasperate to the utmost the tempers of both women. Nevertheless, for the moment, both succeeded in disguising their feelings. The Queen, quickly recovering herself, received the homage of the marchioness, if not graciously, at least without any appearance of coldness; while Henriette, affecting not to see anything unusual in what had occurred, smiled, prattled away and showed herself so much at her ease, that presently they were conversing together to all appearances quite amiably. The King, under the impression that all was now well, made the favourite sit down to supper at his own table, with the Queen and all the princesses, as though to announce to everyone that the situation was accepted.

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[1] See page 46 *supra*.

[2] Such is the account of the incident given by the Venetian Ambassador, but, according to another version, the King seized Madame de Verneuil roughly by the hand and almost threw her on to her knees.

It had been, in point of fact, very far from accepted, and the Queen soon began to treat Madame de Verneuil with marked coldness. The latter, though she did not shrink from the inevitable conflict, decided that it would hardly be to her interest to precipitate it, and accordingly cast about her for some means of temporarily placating her Majesty, which she was not long in finding.

Almost from the first Henri IV. had been plagued by the pretensions and quarrels of his wife's Italian followers. Marie de' Medici's favourite attendant was her foster-sister Leonora, or Dianora, Dosi, a name which she had exchanged for the more high-sounding one of Galigaï. Leonora Galigaï was a strange creature, "diminutive, pale, emaciated, a soul of fire in a diminutive body."[1] Brought up with Marie de' Medici as a humble playfellow and companion, her restless energy had gained so great an ascendency over her phlegmatic mistress that she was quite unable to do without her and had brought her to France.

Now, amongst the Queen's gentlemen, was one Concino Concini, a younger son of good family—his father had been secretary to the Grand Duke of Tuscany—who hoped to find his fortune in France. Concini was "of good presence, of much intelligence, amiable and of obliging manners, and skilled in horsemanship and all bodily exercises." But, according to the gossips of the time, he had "dissipated all his property in gambling, wenching and other pleasures and knaveries," and was debauched to such a degree that, at Florence, "fathers of families forbade their sons to have any intercourse with him." He is even accused of having fallen so low as to enter the service of the Cardinal Charles de Lorraine, at Rome, in the capacity of croupier, but this is probably an invention of his enemies.

One of those crafty Italian adventurers who knew so well how to make use of women, Concini foresaw that his surest way to success was through Leonora, and that, if they worked together, they would completely dominate the Queen. Accordingly, he proceeded to pay her the most assiduous court, and succeeded so well that she fell desperately in love with him. Her passion, indeed, scorned all disguise, and when, during the stay of the Court at Lyons, Concini fell ill, ignoring the meaning smiles and spiteful comments of those about her, she hastened to his bedside and tended him day and night. On his recovery, she introduced him, at all hours, into the apartments of the Queen, who, not ill-disposed towards the handsome gallant on her own account, was induced to treat him with an indulgence compromising to both mistress and maid.[1]

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[1] La Ferrière.

On his arrival at Lyons, Henri IV. had at first received Leonora very kindly, which had encouraged Marie de' Medici to demand, through the Tuscan Ambassador, the title of *dame d'atours* for her favourite. The King inquired if she were of noble birth, and, when the Ambassador admitted that she was only a *cittadina* —she was, in fact, the daughter of a carpenter—replied that the post was one which had always been held by a lady of quality, and that, besides, the Vicomtesse de l'Isle, daughter of M. de la Roche, the Queen's First Equerry, had a prior claim to it. He seemed disposed, however, to permit her to discharge the duties of *dame d'atours,* if Madame de l'Isle were content with the title. But on being informed of her intrigue with Concini, and that she was suspected of lavishing upon her impecunious admirer the money and jewellery which she owed to the liberality of her mistress, he took umbrage, and sent her compatriot Zamet to tell her that the affair must cease and that if she wished to remain in France, she must marry a Frenchman.

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[1] Giovanni de' Medici, uncle of the Queen, retired from the Court in disgust, declaring that " his heart was unable to support the sight of a valet being preferred to him by the Queen, to whom he was so nearly related."—L'Estoile.

La Galigaï, though she feigned submission to the royal commands, had not the least intention of abandoning her lover, and since the entrée to the Queen's apartments was now forbidden him, found means to receive him in those of complaisant friends. Learning of this, the King became much incensed, and before leaving Lyons on his visit to Madame de Verneuil, he strongly advised his wife to send Leonora back to Florence. But when he met the Queen at Nemours to conduct her to Fontainebleau, he found, to his intense annoyance, that she had not paid any heed to his recommendation.

This affair would appear to have been the cause of one of the first quarrels between the royal pair ; indeed, Giovannini, the Florentine Ambassador, in rendering account to the Grand Duke of the presentation of Madame de Verneuil, writes that at Court it was reported that the King had acted thus " in order to indemnify himself for the affront which the princess (the Queen) had offered him in refusing to place any obstacle to the liaison of Leonora and Concini."

Leonora had been present on this occasion. She had, of course, already heard much of this Henriette d'Entragues who had acquired so great an influence over the amorous King that there was scarcely any favour which he could refuse her. She studied her closely, saw that, for the time at any rate, Henriette desired to stand well with the Queen, and decided that she might use her to further her own ambition. She therefore suggested to Marie de' Medici, determined not to be separated from her favourite, but unwilling to remain on bad terms with her husband, that she should avail herself of Madame de Verneuil's influence with his Majesty, and obtained her consent. Intriguing and subtle, the Italian had then little difficulty in concluding a pact with Henriette, promising, in return for the marchioness securing for her the coveted post of *dame d'atours*, " to place her in as much credit as she might desire with the Queen."

Henri IV. consented to what his mistress demanded of him, but he did so with extreme reluctance.

" Do you wish me to remain at the Court ? " said Henriette. " Do you wish the Queen to treat me with kindness and courtesy ? "

" Certainly I wish it."

" Well, then, give her la Galigaï as *dame d'atours*."

" I fear this woman," answered the King ; " I dread her influence. I have done everything possible to send her back to Florence. However, if you desire that she should remain, I consent. God grant that you do not repent of it ! "

And so Leonora became *dame d'atours*, and for a time Madame de Verneuil had no reason to complain of her reception by Marie de' Medici. But the truce was of brief duration.

" The ideal of married life which Henri IV. appears to have formed," writes one of his historians,[1] " was such as might have occurred to an amiable Turk emancipated from the jealous prejudices of the East. A Sultana to be the mother of his heir, and a reigning favourite chosen from among a bevy of women—to one or another of whom the royal handkerchief might from time to time be thrown—were to show their gratitude for the good-humoured indulgence with which he was prepared to treat them, by living amiably and cheerfully together." Tired of having to go so frequently to Verneuil when he desired to enjoy Henriette's society, and delighted at the good understanding which now appeared to reign between wife and mistress, the King announced his intention of installing the latter at the Louvre, or, according to Tallemant des Réaux, at the Hôtel de la Force, close to the Louvre, which was " neither politic nor seemly."

The jealousy of Marie de' Medici broke forth at once, and she complained bitterly to the King of the affront which he had put upon her. Her wrath was increased by the reports which her favourite took care should reach her of the manner in which her rival was in the habit of speaking of her. Having by this time had numerous opportunities of observing the Queen closely, the malice of Henriette had plenty upon which to exercise itself, and she allowed no opportunity to slip of making game of her Majesty, imitating her manners, counterfeiting her Italian accent and referring to her habitually as "*la grosse banquière de Florence.*"

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[1] Mr. P. F. Willert, " Henry of Navarre and the Huguenots in France."

The Duc de Bouillon, in a letter to the Duchesse de Trémouille, has traced a curious picture of the interior of the Louvre at this moment :

"I saw no great ceremony, and did not see the Queen seated, but standing all the time. Near her was Mlle. de Guise, who was working at strips of canvas for tapestry.[1] The King walked up and down the room with her. Madame de Verneuil came in once, and though she caused the Queen to grow red so soon as she caught sight of her, came and talked to her. The said marchioness has very frequent quarrels with the King, who often sees La Bourdaisière, but nothing more. Yesterday evening the said marchioness said to him : 'You intend to go to the war this evening ! You are a valiant man, who does nothing, neither kills nor wounds anyone.' In the evening, the King stayed for half an hour in the Queen's chamber, and then went into the town, whither La Varenne alone accompanied him." [2]

The writer adds that the Queen was on bad terms with her *dame d'honneur*, Madame de Guercheville, and the King with Leonora Galigaï, and that the Court was full of jealousies and quarrels and not much frequented by people of quality.[3]

The situation grew worse when both women found themselves enceinte almost simultaneously. This interesting discovery served but to increase their bitterness towards one another, and the King's domestic peace was ruined, condemned as he was to submit to the perpetual complaints and reproaches of his consort, whom he was obliged to respect, on account of her rank at any rate, and who, exasperated at the gibes in which her rival was reported to be indulging at her expense, no longer referred to her except as "*la putain du roi*."

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[1] It was whispered that Mlle. de Guise, since she could not be Queen, would not have objected to the position of Madame de Verneuil.

[2] Since La Varenne was the confidant of all the King's amours—some writers call him by a harsher name—it is probable that his Majesty intended to visit some fair lady.

[3] Cited by Léon Merlet, "Correspondance de Louise de Coligny."

However, in the early summer, to the inexpressible relief of the harassed monarch, an opportunity of procuring a respite presented itself.

We have seen that Leonora Galigaï had fallen desperately in love with the fascinating Concini, and that, despite the orders of the King, she had declined to abandon him. Emboldened by the success which had attended her efforts to secure the post of *dame d'atours*, she was now resolved to marry her gallant, and found ready support from Marie de' Medici. Pressed by the Queen to give his consent, Henri IV., weary of the tears or sulky looks which invariably followed his refusal, eventually yielded, and even promised a dowry of 5,000 écus, but on condition that the pair returned at once to Florence. To this the Queen, unwilling to be separated from her favourite, naturally refused to agree, and the matter seemed likely to go no further, when la Galigaï bethought herself of utilizing again the services of Madame de Verneuil.

Now, if the truth must be told, that lady, though she professed to despise it, was becoming not a little alarmed at the rancour which she had excited in the bosom of the Queen. Just as continual drops of water will end by wearing through the stone, so the eternal jeremiads and reproaches of his legitimate spouse might so exhaust the patience of the King that a time might come when, rather than endure them any longer, he might decide to rid himself of the cause of them. Besides, Marie de' Medici had shown that, if her tongue were less caustic, it was well-nigh as venomous as her own, and it was not altogether pleasant to hear of the terms in which her Majesty was wont to refer to her, often in the presence of persons with whom she desired to stand well. The favourite was, therefore, not unwilling to oblige Leonora, who was able, if she chose, to put a stop to the diatribes of the Queen, while she was always pleased to show her power.

Leonora begged permission to present Concini to Madame de Verneuil, since he would be able to plead their hard case with her better than she could herself. The marchioness graciously consented, and the cunning Italian took full advantage of his opportunity. Humbly he begged her to employ her good offices on behalf of two lovers, who at present had no hope of being united, save at the price of exile from France. The Queen had intervened in their favour, unhappily to no purpose; but a few words from Madame de Verneuil, whose influence with his Majesty was so great, would doubtless cause him to relent and consent to their marriage, without the hard condition upon which he had hitherto insisted. If she would do this, she might be assured of their eternal gratitude, and that they would do everything in their power to disabuse the Queen's mind of the most unfortunate prejudice which she had conceived against the marchioness. And he would appear to have hinted that her interests and those of himself and his future wife were far from antagonistic, and that great advantages might accrue to both parties if they were prepared to work together.

An adept at flattery, amiable and persuasive, Concini succeeded in securing from Henriette a promise to obtain the King's consent. In the circumstances, this was a matter of little difficulty, for the Béarnais, tired of war, was only too eager to snatch at a chance of peace, or, at any rate, of an armistice, and once more he allowed himself to be persuaded against his better judgment.[1] "The marriage of la Galigaï and Concini must soon take place," writes Villeroy to the Connétable de Montmorency. "The marchioness favours it with all her credit, in order to gratify the Queen, who is very pleased with her."[1]

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[1] According to Tallemant des Réaux, the King once observed : "If I were dead, this fellow would ruin my realm."

According to Giovannini, the King, having resigned himself to the idea of Concini remaining in France, pushed his complaisance so far as actually to excuse himself to the Italian for the harshness which he had shown him. "He did not know him," said he, "and had been told much evil concerning him, but, now that he was undeceived, he wished that he should always follow his person; and he assured the Queen that he would shortly give him the title of Gentleman of the Chamber."[2]

The marriage of Concini and Leonora was celebrated at Saint-Germain-en-Laye on July 12, and Marie de' Medici was so grateful to Madame de Verneuil for having intervened on behalf of her favourites that she treated her, it was said, better than anyone, sent daily to inquire after her health and made her more than one handsome present.

After a short stay at Fontainebleau, where the Queen had been installed for her approaching confinement, early in August Henriette proceeded to Verneuil to prepare for her own. In all her letters she presses the King to rejoin her, but though his Majesty was only too willing to accede to her wish, he knew not what pretext to invoke which would justify his absence from his consort's side at such a time. Finally, he found one in a rather grave incident which threatened to bring about a rupture between France and Spain.

Some young gentlemen belonging to the suite of La Roche-Pot, the French Ambassador at Madrid, quarrelled with some Spaniards; swords were drawn, and two of the Spaniards were killed. The Frenchmen, of course, took refuge at their Embassy, where they believed that they would be safe from arrest ; but the police forced their way in, seized them and haled them off to prison. As the excuses offered by the Spanish Government for the invasion of the Embassy were deemed insufficient, and it declined to set the prisoners at liberty, La Roche-Pot was recalled, and matters began to look distinctly serious. Henri IV. believed, or affected to believe, that the Spaniards might make a sudden attack on some of the fortresses in Picardy, and announced his intention of visiting them and afterwards of going so far as Calais, which would afford him an opportunity of visiting Verneuil on the way. He was with his mistress on August 27, on which day we find him writing to Sully, whom he charges to reconcile the Queen to his journey :

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[1] Letter of June 22, 1600, cited by La Ferrière.

[2] M. Charles Merki, "La Marquise de Verneuil."

> "My friend, I send you the letter which I am writing to my wife, in order that you may carry it to her yourself immediately, and that she may not be offended at this journey or vexed at my absence. Provide for that and also for everything which will be required for her lying-in."[1]

The King, however, did not dare to make more than a very brief stay at Verneuil, and on September 1 he arrived at Calais. He brought with him the Maréchal de Biron and the Comte d'Auvergne, upon both of whom he was resolved to keep a watchful eye, as his suspicions concerning them were now thoroughly aroused, though he had as yet no actual proofs of their treason, or, at any rate, none upon which he cared to act.

Queen Elizabeth was then at Dover, and had proposed to him an interview for the purpose of discussing the question of common action against Spain. But the King feared that such a meeting might alarm his Catholic subjects, and, moreover, he had a shrewd idea that the Queen might seize the opportunity to press for the payment of certain loans which England had made him during his struggles against the League, and which it would be exceedingly inconvenient to liquidate at that moment. He therefore sent Biron to offer his excuses and regrets.

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[1] "Lettres-Missives," t. V.

The marshal was very cordially received by Elizabeth, who invited him to accompany her to London. The Queen suspected as strongly as did Henri IV. that Biron was conspiring with the enemies of France, and it may have been in agreement with her old ally that she took him to visit the Tower. Leading him to a window, she pointed to where the once-loved head of Essex was rotting in wind and rain.

"Had he but confessed," said she, "that he deserved death, I would have spared his life; the benefits which I conferred upon him outweighed the services which he rendered me. He bowed before the headsman, because his pride would not endure to stoop to me. If I grieved for the death of that poor wretch, it was for his ingratitude."

Then, looking fixedly at the marshal, she added significantly:

"If the King would believe me, there are as many heads which need to be cut off in Paris as in London."

"During his long sleepless nights in the Bastille," observes La Ferrière, "Biron must have recalled more than once these prophetic words."

Uneasy at the absence of the King, Marie de' Medici sent Sully to Calais to hasten his master's return.

"Be reassured," wrote Henri on September 7, "I shall be with you before you are brought to bed."

On the 15th, he returned to Fontainebleau, and twelve days later the Queen gave birth to a son, the future Louis XIII.

Marie was seized with the pains of labour soon after midnight on the 27th. They continued for twenty-two hours, and we are assured that, but for her Majesty's courage and robust constitution, the ordeal must have proved fatal. The King's anxiety was such that during the whole of this time he scarcely quitted his consort's bedchamber, to which were admitted the Duchesse de Nemours, the Duc de Montpensier and two Princes of the Blood, the Prince de Conti and the Comte de Soissons. The Ministers and the chief persons of the Court remained in the ante-chamber, as did also, to their intense mortification, the surgeons and physicians attached to the Queen's Household. For Marie, with characteristic obstinacy, had refused to accept the services of anyone but Madame Boursier, a fashionable midwife of the time, whom she herself had selected. Madame Boursier has left us a curious and interesting account of that eventful night :

"The Queen having been delivered, I placed the Dauphin in my lap, without anyone but myself being aware of which sex the child was. The King came up to me. I looked at the child's face and saw that he was extremely weak. I asked M. de Lozeray, one of the King's *valets de chambre,* for wine, and he brought a bottle. I asked him to bring a spoon, and the King took the bottle. I said to him : 'Sire, if this were any other child, I should put wine in its mouth and give it some, from fear that the weakness lasts too long.' The King placed the bottle for me close to the child's mouth and said : 'Do as you would in the case of any other child.' I observed that the King's countenance was sad and altered so long as he did not know of which sex the child was."

Madame Boursier then relates how she gave a prearranged signal to the Queen's first waiting-woman, in order that the latter might inform the King of the birth of a Dauphin :

"The colour returned to the King's face, and, bending down, he put his mouth close to my ear and asked me : 'Midwife, is it a son ?' I told him that it was. 'I entreat you,' said he, 'not to deceive me, for that would kill me.' The King raised his eyes to Heaven, and tears as large as big peas rolled down his face.

"The King asked me whether I had told the Queen. I answered No, but that I begged his Majesty to do so. The King then went and embraced the Queen, saying: '*M'amye*, you have suffered much, but God has blessed us; we have a son!' Her Majesty clasped her hands; a few tears escaped her, and she swooned."[1]

The Queen having been attended to, Henri IV. took the Dauphin in his arms and exhibited him to the crowd of courtiers in the ante-chamber. Then Hérouard, first physician to the King, took possession of the little prince and escorted him, lying in the arms of Madame de Montglat, to the apartments which had been prepared for him.

The birth of an heir to the throne was hailed with transports of delight and "people embraced one another, weeping with joy." All night the town of Fontainebleau celebrated the event by fireworks, bonfires, music and feasting. Barrels of wine were emptied in the courts of the château in honour of their Majesties and the Dauphin, and couriers were despatched to bear the glad tidings to every part of France. In Paris the bells of all the churches rang a merry peal, bonfires blazed in the Place de Grève and cannon boomed from the Arsenal and the Hôtel de Ville. On the morrow a *Te Deum* was sung at Notre Dame, which was attended by the municipal authorities and all the members of the Parlement in their robes; the poor were feasted around the Hôtel de Ville, and a procession was organized through the principal streets of Paris, in which the civic authorities, the Parlement and the clergy of all the parishes took part. The joy was unequivocal, for the birth of a Dauphin seemed to promise a continuance of that peace to which France had been so long a stranger.

Overjoyed at being the father of a legitimate son, intoxicated with pride at having an heir to his throne, Henri IV. could not prevent himself from writing to Madame de Verneuil :

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[1] "Des Naissances de Messeigneurs et Dames les Enfants de France, par Louise Boursier, sage-femme de la Reine, à Paris, 1652."

" My dear heart, I arrived yesterday between eleven and twelve o'clock, tired and suffering from a very bad stomach-ache. My wife is going on well, and my son, thank God ! He has grown and filled out half as much again in these five days since I saw him."

And two days later (October 8) :

" M. d'Entragues has seen my son ; he thinks him a very fine child."

To take her—her of all persons—for his confidante, to tell her that her own father thought the son of " the Florentine " a very fine child, was, in Henriette's opinion, an intolerable insult, and in her reply she must have expressed her resentment in no measured terms. For, on the 19th, we find the King writing to her as follows :

" My dear heart, you have so often promised to be sensible that you cannot doubt that the tone of your second letter has offended me. . . . It has been the fear I have always had of your lack of affection that has rendered me more ready to ascribe to it your hastiness. I have often told you of it, not because I am captious, but because I fear it more than the loss of my life. Attribute it, then, to excessive passion. . . . I should have sent M. de la Rivière to you, but he is obliged to remain in order to make arrangements for my son, who has drained his nurse."

On October 27—just a month after the birth of the Dauphin—Madame de Verneuil also gave birth to a son.

" On Saturday, 4 November," writes L'Estoile, " the King having arrived the day before at Verneuil, the marchioness was there delivered of a son, whom the King kisses and fondles a great deal, calling him his son and saying that he is finer than that of the Queen, who resembles the Medici, being swarthy and fat. Of which it is said that the Queen having been informed, she wept bitterly."

Madame de Verneuil's child was called Henri, after his father, and Gaston, in memory of Gaston de Foix, the illustrious ally of the Royal Family of Béarn.

So soon as both ladies were sufficiently recovered to resume their ordinary mode of life, rejoicings were organized at the Court in celebration of this auspicious double event, and the Queen gave a magnificent ballet, in which she invited Henriette to take part, to the great satisfaction of the King.

CHAPTER VI

Renewal of hostilities between the Queen and Madame de Verneuil—Refusal of Henriette to allow her son to be brought up at Saint-Germain with the Dauphin and the King's children by Gabrielle d'Estrées—Indignation of Marie de' Medici at the ridicule to which she is subjected by the favourite—Henri IV. definitely sacrifices his old flame Marie de la Bourdaisière to the jealousy of Madame de Verneuil—The Capuchin Father Hilaire—His mysterious mission to Rome in the interests of Madame de Verneuil—On his return to France he is arrested and his papers seized—Two very compromising letters from the marchioness are found amongst them—But the King, more infatuated than ever, refuses to allow any further steps to be taken against Father Hilaire—The Duchesse de Villars—She aspires to replace Madame de Verneuil in the good graces of Henri IV.—She persuades the Prince de Joinville to deliver to her the love-letters which Henriette had written him—And places them in the King's hands—Indignation of Henri IV. against the favourite—He is at first resolved upon her immediate disgrace, but is advised by Sully to give her an opportunity to defend herself—Madame de Verneuil boldly denies all knowledge of the letters and declares that they are impudent forgeries—A secretary of the Duc de Guise, noted for his skill in counterfeiting other people's handwriting, is bribed to declare that the letters were forged by him—Interview of Henriette with the King, who is persuaded to believe the lady innocent—Banishment of Joinville—Disgrace of the Duchesse de Villars—Madame de Verneuil becomes more haughty and arrogant than ever.

THE situation which had thus arisen was, however, of such a nature as to render the continuance of peace between the two women impossible. For Henriette, haughty, passionate and vindictive, was, as Lescure observes, born to quarrel and to set people at variance,[1] and the birth of a son had caused her old hopes to revive. "The Florentine has her son," said she, "but I have the Dauphin! The King is my husband, for I still hold his promise!" She spoke of her rights, reminded the King of the engagement which he had not kept,[1] declared that she was his real wife and the true Queen, and that " his Florentine " was nothing but a concubine. And when his Majesty proposed that her son should be sent to Saint-Germain to be brought up with the future Louis XIII. and his children by Gabrielle d'Estrées, she angrily refused. " I will not," she exclaimed, " allow my son to be in the company of all those bastards ! "

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[1] "Les Amours d'Henri IV."

She resumed her former habit of exercising her biting wit and her talent for mimicry at her rival's expense, and allowed no chance to slip of imitating the manners, the gait, the accent, the language, half-Italian, half-French, of Marie de' Medici. Henri IV., so far from resenting this, seems to have been only amused, and when the Queen, speedily informed of the ridicule to which she was again being subjected, complained bitterly to him of the conduct of Madame de Verneuil, advised her " not to take seriously buffooneries which were only indulged in to divert him." Such an excuse, as may be supposed, served merely to exasperate the irate Queen ; she reproached the King bitterly with preferring a wanton to his own lawful wife, insisted that the unseemly jests and outrageous language of which she was the object should cease forthwith, and created a most unpleasant scene which appears to have been repeated on more than one occasion, and left, says an historian of Madame de Verneuil, " a disagreeable impression upon the monarch." [2] Altogether, between the two ladies, his Majesty would seem to have experienced a most trying time, which must have sensibly mitigated the satisfaction he felt at having become, almost simultaneously, the father of two fine boys.

However, like the skilful politician that he was, he did what he could to pacify both, lavishing upon the Queen presents and attentions and definitely sacrificing to the jealousy of Henriette his old flame Marie de la Bourdaisière, whom he was still in the habit of visiting from time to time, but whom he now provided with a dowry and a husband, Charles de Saladin de Savigny. "If she had died of this" (*i.e.*, from being discarded by the King), he wrote to Madame de Verneuil, in informing her that the matter was arranged, "I should have been the homicide." He flattered himself, as he always did, that it was the man, and not the King, whom the lady had loved.

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[1] Henriette never pardoned the King's refusal to carry out his promise, nor ceased to allude to it. L'Estoile mentions that in 1608, when the case of the Baron de Termes, who had acted in similar fashion towards a Mlle. Sagonne, was being discussed, she exclaimed contemptuously, in the presence of Henry IV. himself : " Ha ! by my faith, one says very truly, ' Like master, like valet ! ' "

[2] M. Charles Merki, " La Marquise de Verneuil."

In the autumn of 1601, an event occurred which might have had very embarrassing consequences for Madame de Verneuil had Henri IV.'s passion for this woman, her one safeguard against all the hatred and jealousy which her excessive favour had aroused, been less blind and insensate.

At the beginning of February of that year, Cardinal d'Ossat, the French Ambassador at Rome, received a visit from a Capuchin monk, in religion Father Hilaire, but whose real name was Alphonse Travail. A native of Grenoble and brought up in the Protestant religion, he had served as a soldier up to the age of thirty, when he had abandoned the cuirass for the cowl, but without succeeding in divesting himself of the bold manners of the trooper. He presented himself to d'Ossat with all the assurance in the world, and handed him a letter of credence from Henri IV. himself, dated the preceding October 19, which desired the Ambassador to obtain for him an audience of the Pope and interviews with cardinals and other prelates. He was also the bearer of letters from the Duke of Bar and the Cardinal de Lorraine, and had come, he told d'Ossat, to Rome to solicit from the Holy Father the absolution of the Duke of Bar, who had married Henri IV.'s sister Catherine de Bourbon, a Protestant, without a dispensation.

According to Father Hilaire, he was on intimate terms with the King—whom he boasted of addressing in the second person singular—and Madame de Verneuil, and, in the delicate situation to which Henri IV.'s marriage had given rise, they had allowed themselves to be guided by his advice. It was he who had persuaded the King to send away his mistress before the arrival of Cardinal Aldobrandini, and it was he who had counselled the King to find a husband of high degree for Madame de Verneuil and to provide her with a munificent dowry, and had urged the marchioness to surrender to the King the promise of marriage which he had given her. And, in proof of his assertions, he placed before the eyes of the astonished Cardinal a copy of the famous promise, and two letters from Madame de Verneuil, from which it appeared that the monk had been commissioned to sound the Duc de Nevers, then in residence at Rome, through his man of affairs, M. de la Bretonnière, on the question of a marriage between him and the marchioness, and, in the event of the duke being favourably disposed to this project, to show him the document with which he had been entrusted.

Now, this Father Hilaire was an intriguer of a very dangerous kind, an agent and spy of the Duke of Savoy, who had, in fact, during his visit to the Court of France, recommended him to Madame de Verneuil, in the hope that she might be able to make use of his services to stir up trouble in regard to the Tuscan marriage, which, as we know, he was most anxious to prevent. At Chambéry, in the following October, Henriette had presented him to the King, and, on the strength of the credentials which he carried from the Duke of Bar and the Cardinal de Lorraine, had no difficulty in obtaining for him the letter of recommendation to the French Ambassador to the Vatican.

What the Capuchin had told Cardinal d'Ossat about the matrimonial negotiation with which Madame de Verneuil had entrusted him would appear to have been true enough. For, though quite decided to remain the mistress of Henri IV., if, notwithstanding his marriage, he did not separate from her, the marchioness was likewise determined, in the event of a rupture, to extract from him a large sum of money, in order to enable her to make a brilliant marriage. But Father Hilaire naturally said nothing concerning a second and more secret mission with which Henriette had also charged him. This was to deliver to Clement VIII. the copy of the promise of marriage which the King had given her, a weapon of which she might be able to make use of later to bring about the dissolution of Henri IV.'s marriage with Marie de' Medici.

Father Hilaire seems to have made a far from favourable impression upon d'Ossat, who, in a despatch to Villeroy, describes him as "a Capuchin very giddy and vain, with a head full of wind and smoke." However, since Henri IV. had enjoined him to solicit for this monk an audience of the Holy Father, he could not refuse to do so, though, as Clement VIII. would not seem to have been particularly anxious to discuss the affairs of the Duke of Bar, some little time elapsed before it was accorded.

What happened at the interview the Ambassador was unable to discover, but, in the meantime, the suspicions which he had from the first entertained about the Capuchin were confirmed by a letter from Villeroy, who wrote that there could be no doubt that Father Hilaire was a spy of the Duke of Savoy, who had been instructed to insinuate himself into the confidence of Henri IV. and the Marquise de Verneuil, in order to obtain from them letters of recommendation of which he might make an improper use. Informed that this dangerous monk was about to set out for Paris, d'Ossat endeavoured to prevent him, and requested Father Monopoli, procurator-general of the Capuchin Order, to relegate him to some convent in Italy. That ecclesiastic replied that he would willingly do so, but, unfortunately, Father Hilaire had taken the precaution to provide himself with a "letter of obedience"[1] from

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[1] A letter of obedience was an authorization for a monk to move from one convent to another.

Cardinal de Séverin, protector of their Order, and he could not therefore prevent him leaving Italy. He would send, however, authority to the Provincial of Paris, or the Superior of the Convent of the Capuchins there, at which the monk proposed to stay, to examine him and seize his papers.

Accordingly, soon after Father Hilaire arrived in Paris, early in November, his cell at the Capuchins was suddenly invaded and all his papers, which he had concealed in the mattress of his bed, were seized, together with a short sword, with a very wide blade, "of which he must have made use on more than one occasion."[1] Among his papers were two letters from Madame de Verneuil.

Villeroy, in reporting the matter to the King, wrote as follows:

> "I send you two letters from the marchioness, written from Chambéry, concerning the propositions which this monk made at that time, who appears to me more full of vanity and presumption accompanied by ignorance than of any other design of consequence. That is why I think he ought to be sent away from here and relegated to some convent where he may have leisure for mortification."

For a person who was able to read them with unprejudiced eyes, Henriette's letters were very compromising. But, perhaps fortunately for her, it was only two or three weeks since her child had been born, and the King was more infatuated with her than ever. "My *menon*" (*sic*), he writes to her on November 13, "I am extremely desirous to see you, which will not be until you have recovered. Love me always and be assured that you will be the only one who will possess my love."[2]

In these circumstances, it was scarcely to be expected that he would pay much attention to the evidence against the favourite, and it was, without doubt, in order to please her that he instructed Villeroy to take no further steps against Father Hilaire. That worthy, who had been placed under arrest, was accordingly set at liberty. Having abandoned the cowl, he became a secular priest, in which capacity he continued his intrigues and ended by being broken on the wheel in the Place de Grève (May 10, 1617), on a charge of having conspired to poison Marie de' Medici.

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[1] La Ferrière.

[2] "Lettres-Missives."

Scarcely had Henriette escaped from this danger, than she fell into another, and one much more serious. For, on this occasion, the jealousy of the King was awakened with good reason, and she ran the risk of being exiled from the Court and relegated to a perpetual exile at Verneuil.

It was the machinations of a rival beauty, Julienne Hippolyte d'Estrées—a sister of Gabrielle d'Estrées—who had married Gui de Brancas, Marquis, and afterwards, Duc de Villars, which fired the powder.

After Gabrielle's death, the Duchesse de Villars, whom Henri IV. had perhaps treated with a little too much kindness, as he treated most women, had for a moment hoped for the reversion of her sister's post, and she had not forgiven Madame de Verneuil for having secured this coveted position. The duchess was not strictly beautiful; indeed, if we can believe the Princesse de Conti, who, however, was so jealous of other women that her statements concerning them must be accepted with reserve, her only attractions were "her youth and her hair."[1] Tallemant des Réaux, however, says that she also possessed a fine figure and a good complexion, while, according to a modern writer, "her eyes betrayed that sensual flame which provokes desire."[2] What is certain, is that Madame de Villars entertained a very high opinion of the power of whatever charms she may have possessed, and was quite convinced that if she could only contrive to get rid of Henriette, she would

[1] "Les Amours du Grand Alcandre."

[2] La Ferrière.

have little difficulty in replacing her in the good graces of the King.

Judging that the Queen, exasperated to the last degree against the favourite, might prove a useful ally, she persuaded Mlle. de Guise to introduce her into her Majesty's little circle of friends, and seized the first favourable opportunity of revealing her project to her. Needless to say, she said nothing to Marie about her ultimate object, which, however, the latter could scarcely have failed to divine. But so anxious was the Queen for the downfall of her enemy that she listened willingly to Madame de Villars, gave her to understand that she might reckon upon any assistance she might be able to give her without compromising herself and promised to keep the matter a profound secret. As, however, Marie was quite unable to conceal anything from Leonora Galigaï, that lady and her husband soon got wind of the plot, but they decided that it would be better not to be mixed up in it, at any rate for the present, and awaited developments. These were not long in coming.

It happened that the Prince de Joinville, who was at that time the gallant *à la mode*, a sort of seventeenth-century Duc de Richelieu, in fact—that same Prince de Joinville who had been so high in Madame de Verneuil's favour prior to Henri IV.'s appearance on the scene, and had quarrelled and fought with Bellegarde about her in the courtyard of Zamet's hôtel—had fallen in love with Madame de Villars, and desired to add her to the list of his conquests. That lady, however, opposed to him a quite unexpected resistance, and when, piqued by his ill success, he pressed his suit more ardently, informed him that she was prepared to surrender on one condition only: he must prove the sincerity of his devotion by delivering to her the letters which Madame de Verneuil had written him.

"But what will you do with them?" inquired the astonished prince.

"I shall keep them and shall make no use of them, unless I learn that you are seeing Madame de Verneuil again."

Joinville demurred, but, on being assured by the duchess that in no other way could he hope to obtain her favours, was weak enough to consent.

Once in possession of Henriette's letters, Madame de Villars hastened to carry them to Marie de' Medici, who, in her joy at the prospect of her rival's speedy disgrace, is said to have overwhelmed the duchess with presents. Nothing now remained but to place the compromising letters under the eyes of Henry IV., and Madame de Villars suggested that the Queen was the proper person to undertake this. But her Majesty objected, on the ground that, were she to appear in the matter, the King might question their genuineness. Madame de Villars, on the other hand, feared to prejudice her chance of securing the exalted position which must soon fall vacant, since to open the eyes of a lover to the unworthiness of his mistress is ever an ungrateful task; and it was only with great difficulty that she was finally persuaded to act.

Some days later, Madame de Villars having met the King as though by accident, begged him to grant her a private interview, "as she had things to tell him which concerned him very closely." Not a little puzzled, Henri IV. gave her a rendezvous in a church, and taking her into one of the side-chapels, desired his attendants to leave them.

So soon as they were alone, Madame de Villars placed Henriette's letters in his Majesty's hands, and, in order to excuse her denunciation, urged "the obligations under which his kindness had placed her," which was the reason why she was unable "to conceal from him the outrages of which he was the object."

"I thank you, Madame, for so much devotion," said the monarch, in a tone which betrayed his annoyance. And he left her abruptly and returned to the Louvre to study the letters at his leisure.

When he had mastered their contents, he was naturally furious, for, even supposing that the letters—the majority of which probably bore no date—had all been written *prior* to the beginning of his connection with Henriette, had not the latter repeatedly assured him, during his wooing at Malesherbes, that no man but himself had ever gained her heart, and the tone of some of these letters went far to warrant the assumption that she had given the fascinating M. de Joinville not only her heart, but a good deal more.

His first impulse was to go to Madame de Verneuil, reproach her with her perfidy, and inform her that he was determined never to see her again. But, on reflecting that such a course would be sure to provoke a most violent scene, and that he was no match for the lady when it came to a verbal encounter, he charged one of his confidants, the Comte de Lude, to notify the marchioness of her disgrace and the cause of it. At the same time, he sent for Sully, whom he invariably consulted in his domestic difficulties, as well as in more important matters, though, as we know, he was not always inclined to follow the advice of this sage counsellor.

Sully found the King in a towering passion, and he even talked of poniarding Joinville and taking away from the marchioness all that he had given her. But, though the Minister detested Henriette and would have rejoiced at her disgrace, he knew the deplorable weakness of his master in regard to this woman and felt certain that, with her diabolical ingenuity, she would succeed in clearing herself, in which event he would, were he now to incite the King against her, make of her an implacable and dangerous enemy. Not a little to his Majesty's surprise, therefore, he counselled more moderation.

"Do not condemn her, Sire, without hearing her," said he.

"You are right, my friend," replied the King, who secretly desired to give the marchioness an opportunity to explain matters.

Meantime, the Comte de Lude, who, it may be supposed, did not at all relish the mission which had been entrusted to him, had waited upon Madame de Verneuil. It seems not improbable that the latter had received some hint of the danger which threatened her, since she listened to the announcement of her disgrace with the most perfect composure.

"As I am confident," said she, "of never having done anything which might offend the King, I cannot imagine why he treats me so ill. I hope that the truth will avenge me of those who have given him such grievous impressions."

And when Lude went on to speak of the letters which had fallen into the King's hands, she at once, with imperturbable effrontery, denied all knowledge of such epistles and declared that they must be impudent forgeries. Then she coldly dismissed the bewildered count, and retired into her cabinet, without doubt much more disturbed than she had allowed her visitor to perceive.

The position in which the lady found herself was certainly a very disquieting one, but, happily for her, if she had no one to whom she could look for assistance, Joinville had friends and relatives eager to protect him from the consequences of his folly, and it was they who saved the situation for both.

The Grand Equerry, Bellegarde, one of the oldest and most intimate of the King's friends, had learned of the affair. Bellegarde happened at that time to be in love with Mlle. de Guise, and, more for her sake than for that of her brother Joinville, informed her of it and offered his aid. The princess, much alarmed, lost no time in communicating with her relatives, and a family council was held at the Hôtel de Guise, when a plot was concerted which it was hoped would serve to counteract very effectually the machinations of Madame de Villars.

The Duc de Guise had a secretary who was noted for the remarkable skill with which he imitated every kind of writing, and who would have made an ideal forger. It was decided that Joinville should maintain that this man, being madly enamoured of Madame de Villars and having in his possession specimens of Henriette's handwriting, had, in order to please the duchess, concocted the whole of the compromising correspondence, of which, stricken by remorse, he had now confessed himself to be the author. The concurrence of the secretary was secured by handsome gifts and the promise of still more generous proofs of his employer's gratitude, and by an assurance that the influence of the Guises and Madame de Verneuil should be used to save him from any severe punishment for his supposed crime.

It was a bold stroke, to say the least of it, but it succeeded; for, in point of fact, the King was only too willing to allow himself to be persuaded of his mistress's innocence, and would, perhaps, have accepted an even more improbable story. Henriette demanded permission to justify herself. He hesitated at first, knowing her to be an expert in trickery and deceit, but finally consented to hear her explanations. From that moment her victory was assured; indeed, so skilfully did she plead her cause, so artfully did she contrive to combine truth and falsehood, that a less infatuated lover than the Béarnais might have been pardoned for believing her or at any rate giving her the benefit of the doubt. And so the interview, which at the outset had been decidedly constrained, ended with caresses and a promise "to say no more about the matter."

The King, however, felt far from kindly disposed towards M. de Joinville, and that gallant, "having added political offences of a graver nature to his amorous pranks,"[1] was invited to betake himself to Hungary to fight as a volunteer in the Imperial forces against the

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[1] "On Sunday, December 1, 1602," writes L'Estoile, "the King, who was in Paris, delivered the Prince de Joinville into the keeping of M. de Guise, his brother, but for whose entreaties and solicitation his Majesty would have sent him to the Bastille, since he considered him privy to the machinations and conspiracies of the Maréchal de Biron, and told the Prince de Joinville to thank his brother, whom he loved. Two days afterwards the Chancellor examined him, and it was said that his full and frank confession had saved him from prison."

Turks. The secretary who was so skilful in counterfeiting other people's handwriting was sent to prison, though for a much shorter period than he would have deserved if he had really been guilty. As for Madame de Villars, she received an order to retire to her husband's country-seat and not to present herself again at Court, having gained nothing by her little plot except a dangerous and powerful enemy.

Triumphantly re-established in the favour of the King, Madame de Verneuil became more haughty and arrogant than ever.[1] So soon as she learned that Marie de' Medici was making arrangements to give a splendid ballet at the Court, called the *Ballet des Virtus*, she exacted from Henri IV. a promise that she should appear in it. The Queen was furious at the idea that the marchioness, who now almost openly mocked at and derided her, should take part in an entertainment which she had intended to reserve for her own friends, but, vanquished in the person of Madame de Villars, whose machinations she was shrewdly suspected of having encouraged, she was obliged to yield.

The ballet began with a *récitatif*, the words of which had been written by the bishop-poet Bertaut, and contained a transparent allusion to the undisputed favour of Madame de Verneuil :

> " Flambeaux étincelans, clairs astres d'ici bas,
> De qui les doux regards mettent les cœurs en cendre,
> Beaux jeux qui contraigniez les plus fiers de se rendre,
> Ravissant aux vainqueurs le prix de leurs combats."

Then four groups of eight ladies, the Queen at the head of the last, performed the dances arranged by the master of the Court fêtes.[2]

The Papal Nuncio, the Archbishop of Camerino, was amongst the spectators. Pointing out to him all these beauties in short skirts, whose raiment of transparent gauze left very little to the imagination, the Vert-Galant inquired :

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[1] L'Estoile reports that Henriette gave, on Innocents' Day, 1602, a great banquet to the ladies of the Court, " in proof of her innocence."

[2] La Ferrière.

" What think you of that squadron ? "

" *Bellissimo*," replied the Nuncio, " but very dangerous ; one ought to look at it as one looks at the sun, in blinking one's eyes."

CHAPTER VII

Conspiracy of the Maréchal de Biron—The marshal's principal agent La Fin betrays all the plans of the conspirators to Henri IV.—Measures taken by the King to meet the danger—He summons Biron to Court, and, after considerable delay, the latter obeys—His arrival at Fontainebleau, where he is assured by the treacherous La Fin that "they know nothing"—His conversation with Henri IV. in the gardens of the château—The King is willing to forgive everything in return for a full confession—But the marshal protests that he has been foully calumniated—Biron's arrest and that of his accomplice the Comte d'Auvergne, Madame de Verneuil's half-brother, decided upon—Henri IV. once more appeals to the marshal to confess, but without effect—Biron and the Comte d'Auvergne are arrested and conveyed to the Bastille—The marshal is brought to trial on a charge of high treason—Alarming revelations as to the extent of the conspiracy—Question of whether Madame de Verneuil was involved in it considered—Biron is found guilty and condemned to death—Refusal of the King to commute the capital penalty—Last hours and death of Biron—Despicable conduct of the Comte d'Auvergne—He is set at liberty—Leniency with which he is treated disapproved by the public, which attributes it to his relationship to Madame de Verneuil.

FOR the moment, Madame de Verneuil was triumphant, but in the summer of 1602 an event occurred which revived the Queen's hopes of the downfall of her rival.

Ever since the visit of the Duke of Savoy to the French Court, the Maréchal de Biron, whom that astute prince had contrived to seduce from his allegiance, had been in treasonable communication with the enemies of France, and, with the assistance of Henriette's contemptible half-brother, the Comte d'Auvergne, and that unquiet spirit the Duc de Bouillon, endeavouring to stir up disaffection within the realm.

Nothing definite appears to have been settled before the war between France and Savoy, for the support of Spain was indispensable to the confederates, and the

Court of Madrid distrusted its ability to cope with so redoubtable an adversary as Henri IV. had already proved himself. Accordingly, it declared that during the King's life nothing could be done. At the same time, it suggested that this obstacle might be removed, and various plans for the assassination of Henri were discussed, as well as the terms upon which the Duke of Savoy would be prepared to bestow his daughter's hand on Biron.

During the campaign against Savoy, the marshal continued his intrigues, seeking by the aid of various emissaries to provoke a mutiny in the army or an insurrection in France. But the King, who had his suspicions of what was going on, if he had no proofs, took the precaution of placing under Biron's orders officers upon whose devotion he could rely, and the traitor was effectually checkmated.

On the termination of the war, Biron, being of opinion that it would be useless to attempt anything further at the moment, and aware that the King already suspected him, thought it advisable to confess to him that he had had some dealings with Savoy, and in a moment of pique had asked for the hand of Charles Emmanuel's daughter. And for whatever he had done amiss he very humbly entreated his Majesty's pardon, which was readily granted, the King, at the same time, advising him to get rid of his confidant La Fin, his evil genius and the principal agent of his intrigues.

This he promised to do, but he did not keep his word, and scarcely had peace been signed than he was again listening to the offers of the Duke of Savoy and the Spaniards. The baits held out to him proved irresistible, and he became the centre of all who plotted against King or country in France. He flattered the Ultramontane party by affecting to be a zealous Catholic and deploring Henri IV.'s sinful tolerance of heresy, while, at the same time, he and Bouillon endeavoured to persuade the Huguenots that their extermination had been promised to the Pope. In the towns his emissaries disseminated a report that the recently imposed and highly unpopular *pancarte*, or tax on sales, was but the beginning of a new system of fiscal oppression ; and the inhabitants of those provinces which were exempt from or had compounded for the *gabelle* were informed that Sully intended to impose a uniform salt-tax on the whole kingdom.[1]

But the conspiracy was divulged ; the very man who had had in his hands all its threads betrayed the marshal.

At the instances of the Spaniards, who had become suspicious of him, Biron had replaced La Fin by another agent, the Baron de Lux. At the beginning of April, 1602, La Fin, who would appear to have been only waiting for a favourable opportunity to betray his employer and conjectured from this that he had probably got as much out of the marshal and his accomplices as he was likely to get, wrote to the King warning him that there was a conspiracy on foot. Henri IV., anxious for further information, thereupon summoned him to Fontainebleau. The cunning rascal consulted Biron as to what he ought to do, and the latter, who had no suspicion that La Fin was meditating treachery, told him that he must obey the royal command, but warned him to destroy all his papers and to take care to reveal nothing which might serve to compromise them. That Henri IV should have sent for La Fin did not altogether surprise him, since he was aware that the King had long distrusted that personage.

Arrived at Fontainebleau, La Fin, on the promise of a free pardon and a handsome reward, did not hesitate to divulge all that he knew. Henri IV. was at first unwilling to believe him ; but he had proofs which it was impossible to question, and placed in his Majesty's hands letters of Biron which he had been charged to dispatch to Turin, Madrid and elsewhere, but which he had kept, substituting for them spurious copies. These revealed that Biron had signed with the Comte d'Auvergne and the Duc de Bouillon a " pact of mutual defence ; " that revolts were to be engineered in Poitou and Touraine ; that the co-operation of the Huguenot chiefs was to be invited ; that on the death of Henri IV. —which, it was hoped, would very shortly happen !— the Dauphin was to be passed over, and the crown placed on the head of Henriette's son, who was to be legitimated.

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[1] P. F. Willert, "Henry of Navarre and the Huguenots in France."

The King was thunderstruck ; but the treason was flagrant and the danger great, and it was necessary to act without delay. He accordingly wrote to Biron that what he had heard from La Fin had entirely satisfied him and begging him to come to Court, while he himself, on the advice of Sully, hurried into the western provinces, where he feared the discontent of the towns and the peasantry and the influence of Bouillon amongst the Huguenots. He reassured the Protestants, who, as a matter of fact, had remained perfectly quiet, despite the duke's efforts to induce them to rise, contradicted the malicious reports about new imposts and the extension of the salt-tax, and received protestations of loyalty, which he deemed it politic to believe, from the Connétable de Montmorency and the Duc d'Épernon, both of whom were compromised by the correspondence which La Fin had placed in his hands. Since Biron had not thought fit to obey the royal command, on May 31 he wrote to him again, from Plessis-lez-Tours, bidding him meet him at Orléans, where he intended to keep the festival of Corpus Christi. The marshal, however, still hesitated to put himself in his sovereign's power, his friends telling that " he would be mad if he were to carry his head to the King."

However, La Fin had written him declaring that he had revealed nothing ; and, relying on the assurance of this traitor and alarmed by the King's threat that, if he declined to obey his summons, he would come in person to Burgundy to fetch him, he set out for Fontainebleau, to which Henri IV. had now returned. He had decided to appeal to the King's old friendship and to oppose a brazen denial to any charges brought against him, which he felt confident would be little more than vague surmises resting on no certain evidence.

No one was less vindictive and more humane than Henri IV., and he assured Sully that if Biron were only prepared to confess everything and sue for pardon, all should be forgiven and forgotten. This clemency seems at first sight the height of imprudence, but he probably justified it by the reflection that after such abasement the marshal would no longer be dangerous.[1]

Biron reached Fontainebleau in the evening of June 13. Cavalry patrols had followed him all the way, with orders to arrest him if he showed any intention of changing his route. On his arrival, he was met by La Fin, who whispered: "Courage, my master, *they know nothing!*" This lying assurance confirmed the marshal in his determination to deny everything.

When the Court was in residence at Fontainebleau, the King was in the habit of walking in the gardens every morning, and next day, knowing that he would be pretty sure to find him alone, Biron presented himself before him. The first impulse of Henri IV., who was taken by surprise, was to embrace his old companion-in-arms, to whom he said in a kindly tone:

"It is well for you, marshal, that you have come. You are going to confess everything to me, are you not?"

Unhappily for Biron, instead of taking advantage of the good-will of the monarch, which would have been his salvation, he haughtily replied:

"I have nothing to say, Sire. I have only come to demand justice on my enemies."

The King changed countenance.

"Is that your last word, marshal?" he rejoined.

"Yes, Sire."

"Well, come this evening to the Queen's card-table, and I will speak to you again. Meantime, think matters over," he added significantly, and dismissed him.

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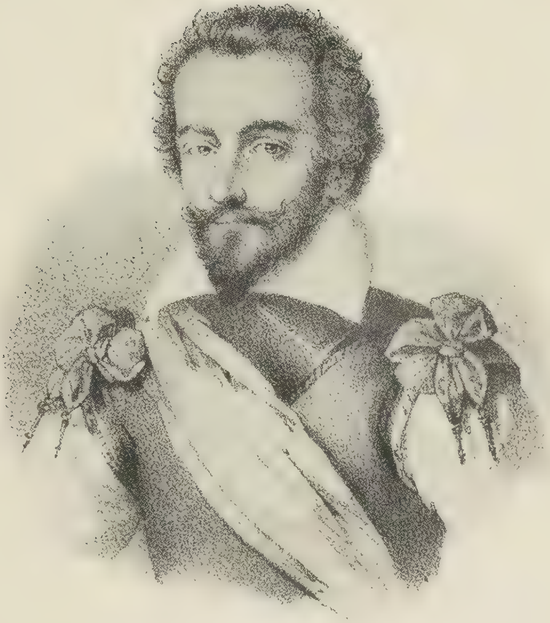
[1] P. F. Willert, "Henry of Navarre and the Huguenots in France.



Biron.

biron

The Maréchal Duc de Biron.
From a contemporary print.

[*To face p.* 110.

In the course of the day he sent Sully to the marshal, and also the Comte de Soissons, to advise him to conceal nothing and to hope everything from his master's affection, for " he would have desired," writes the former, " to save the culprit absolutely." But Biron was obdurate, protesting that he had been foully calumniated, and that he had done nothing beyond what he had already admitted to the King after the campaign against Savoy.

The King thereupon summoned a meeting of the Council and laid the matter before it. The Council, with one voice, declared that Biron and his accomplice the Comte d'Auvergne, who was also at Fontainebleau, ought to be arrested forthwith ; but " it was only with great difficulty that Henri IV. was able to decide to act with rigour."[1]

" So be it," said he at length. " I share your opinion. I have invited the marshal to the Queen's card-table ; if he persists this evening in refusing to make any confession, I will give you your orders."

That evening, as Biron entered the court of the château, a note was slipped into his hand. It was as follows :

" *Leave on the instant ; in two hours you will be arrested.*"

Without paying any attention to this warning, which bore no signature and the handwriting of which he did not recognize, the marshal entered the Queen's apartments with his usual proud and haughty mien, and, having saluted their Majesties, took a seat at the card-table and began to play at primero. He had not been playing long, however, before the Comte d'Auvergne, looking very much disturbed, came up and, bending down, whispered :

" It is dangerous for us two here ! "

But the advice came too late.

The King was the first to rise from the card-table, and, beckoning to Biron, drew him aside and said :

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[1] Sully, " Œconomies royales."

"Biron, you know that I have loved you. Confess all, and I will pardon you."

"Sire," answered the marshal, "permit me to repeat what I have already told you, that I have come only to demand justice on my enemies."

Without condescending to make any rejoinder, Henri IV. turned away, and, proceeding to his cabinet, sent for Vitry, the Captain of the Guard, and Praslin, and ordered them to arrest Biron and Auvergne as they were leaving the Queen's apartments. Then he returned and, addressing Biron a last time, said:

"You know what I have told you, marshal."

Biron remained silent.

"Ah, well! the Comte d'Auvergne will tell me more about it. Farewell, *Baron* de Biron!"

It was the marshal's sentence of death, and, as he passed into the ante-chamber, Vitry stepped up to him.

"In the King's name," said he, laying his hand on Biron's arm, "you are my prisoner!" And he demanded his sword.

Biron, who appeared utterly astounded, broke out into laments and protestations. Was this, he asked, the reward of his many campaigns, his numerous wounds, his father's merits? He must and would speak to the King. At length, he drew his sword and surrendered it to Vitry, exclaiming:

"There it is, that sword which has rendered the King so many services!"[1]

The marshal was conducted to the Bastille, as was the Comte d'Auvergne, who had left the Queen's apartments while the King was giving orders for his arrest, and was in the act of mounting his horse in the Cour Ovale with the intention of making his escape, when Praslin apprehended him.

At the end of July, Biron was arraigned before the Parlement on a charge of high treason, the peers of the realm being summoned to take their places amongst the judges, as was customary when one of their number was on his trial. None of them, however, appeared, which was scarcely surprising, seeing that quite a number of them were more or less compromised by the marshal's intrigues. They were unwilling to condemn yet dared not acquit.

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[1] Sully, "Œconomies royales."

The trial, which lasted six days—from the 23rd to the 29th of July—produced strange and alarming revelations. All kinds of prominent personages appeared to have been coquetting with the conspiracy, and even to have given a sort of provisional adhesion to it, amongst them being, in addition to Montmorency and d'Épernon, already mentioned, the Duc de Montpensier, a Prince of the Blood, and the Ducs de la Trémouille and de Ventadour. After the King and his family—" the lion and his whelps," as they were styled in the correspondence of Biron—had been cleared out of the way, the Crown of France, in the event of Henriette's son not attaining manhood, was to be declared elective, and the great vassals, like the Princes of the Empire, to be practically sovereigns in their own territories. Biron was to receive a sum of 1,800,000 crowns for the purpose of carrying on the war, and, on its successful conclusion, the hand of a princess of Spain or Savoy in marriage, a dowry of 300,000 crowns and the independent sovereignty of Franche-Comté, Burgundy and the Bresse, which were to be ceded to him on condition of his doing homage for them to the Catholic King. Finally, Provence, Dauphiné and the Lyonnais were to pass to Savoy. An independence similar to that of the free Imperial cities would, it was hoped, induce the larger towns to acquiesce in the disruption of the kingdom.

Was Madame de Verneuil, like her half-brother the Comte d'Auvergne, an accomplice of Biron ? Was she involved in this most dangerous conspiracy ? The point has been much disputed. It is certain that no evidence was forthcoming at the trial which directly proved her complicity, but having regard to the part she played in the conspiracy of 1604, of which we shall speak in due course, of that played by her half-brother on the present occasion, of her previous relations with Biron and the Duke of Savoy, and, above all, the fact that the success of the plot would have meant the realization of her ambitious dreams, no reasonable doubt, we think, can exist that she at any rate knew and approved of it, even though she may not have given it any active support.

Biron defended himself with much ability, but the evidence of his guilt was overwhelming, and the charges of having conspired against the State, of intended regicide and of having negotiated with foreign Powers to bring about the invasion of France were proved up to the hilt. Without a dissentient voice, his judges condemned him to have his head cut off in the Place de Grève, while his property was to be confiscated and he was to be degraded from all his honours and dignities. After the sentence several of the judges are said to have shed tears, as they thought of "the miserable fate of this valiant swordsman," and great efforts were made by the marshal's relatives and friends to persuade the King to commute it. But Henri IV. was inflexible on the question of the death penalty, though he consented to spare the condemned man the ignominy of a public execution in the Place de Grève, and gave orders that the sentence should be carried out in the courtyard of the Bastille. His severity on this occasion, which is in striking contrast with the generous anxiety he had shown to spare Biron at Fontainebleau, is, however, not difficult to understand. At that time he was not aware of the full extent of the conspiracy, nor of how far the great nobles were prepared to go in order to further their selfish ambitions, and he now recognized that it was absolutely necessary to make an example.

L'Estoile, in his "Journal," gives a lengthy account of the last hours and death of Biron, which, however, is so curious and interesting that we need make no apology for reproducing it here :

"At eleven o'clock in the morning, on July 31, 1602, the Chancellor and the First President, accompanied by the Civil and Criminal Lieutenants of the Châtelet, the Provost of the Merchants and four sheriffs of the town, the Provost Rapin and some members of his company, the registrars of the court, six ushers and some sergeants, entered the Bastille, where the curé of Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs and Garnier, his confessor, preacher to the King, were already for the purpose of exhorting the Sieur de Biron to think of his conscience and to make him prepare for death. But he refused to listen to them at all, being unable to persuade himself that they were in good earnest. The company entered the room and found him engaged in consulting three or four almanacs, contemplating the moon, the day, the signs and other things relating to the judgment. The Chancellor, having saluted him, demanded the King's Order, which he delivered to him, drawing it from his breeches' pocket, after having at first refused it ; then they ripped the Cross of the Holy Ghost[1] from his cloak, and the other ceremonies connected with the degradation of a marshal of France were performed. The said Chancellor said then to Biron that they had come to announce to him his sentence of death, and to have it executed, and the registrar of the criminal courts added : 'Monsieur, place yourself in position, that is to say, on your knees.' And he read the sentence to him. But when he came to these words : 'Condemned to have his head cut off in the Place de Grève,' Biron exclaimed : 'That is a fine recompense for my services, to die ignominiously before everybody !' The Chancellor then began to speak and said : 'Monsieur, the King has granted the favour which has been demanded of him by your relatives, and the execution of your sentence will be carried out in this place of the Bastille.' 'Is that the favour which he does me ?' said the condemned man again. 'Ha ! ingrate, thankless, pitiless.' And with that uttered things unworthy of a lofty soul and of a generous man, speaking in this fashion : ‘ And why does he not employ clemency towards me, since he has done so towards many others, who have offended him more ? ’ He named then M. d’Épernon and M. de Mayenne, adding that the Queen of England would have pardoned the Earl of Essex if he had demanded it of her. ‘ And why not me ? ’ he continued, ‘ who demand it of him so humbly, without taking into consideration the services of my late father and my relatives, and my wounds which demand it sufficiently of themselves.’ There were other disputes, and Biron ended by laying the blame on the Chancellor, calling him ‘ an unjust man, who regarded neither religion nor law, a plaster image with a great nose, who had iniquitously condemned him to death ; whom, for the wrong that he had done him, he summoned to appear before God in a year and a day.’ And he strode about the room, his countenance distorted and frightful to behold, repeating : ‘ *Ha minimé ! minimé !* ’ Then he spoke of the King and of himself, saying : ‘ Ah well, I shall die and shall receive no mercy ; but he does not know all my secret, and will never know it from me.’ Those present exhorted him to pray to God and to think of his conscience, but he answered that that was done, and spoke of his property ; of what was owing to him and of what he owed, adding that the King could dispose of the rest. He said further that he was leaving a girl pregnant by him, to whose child he left a house which he had recently bought at Dijon and six thousand écus.[1] He further demanded if there were anyone there in the service of M. de Rosny (Sully), and one of the latter’s secretaries having stepped forward, he said to him :

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[1] The Order of the Holy Ghost, founded by Henry III., was the highest Order of Knighthood in France, corresponding to that of the Garter in England.

“ ‘ Tell M. de Rosny that I have always been his good friend and servant, and that I die such. Those who have made him understand the contrary and that it was my intention to kill him have deceived him. I recommend to him my two brothers, so that the little one may be given to the Dauphin to serve him, and I wish that my other relatives should be also recommended to him. I desire him to advise them not to come to the Court for some time.' He drew from his finger a ring and gave it to this secretary to carry to the Comtesse de Roussy, his sister, and gave another to the Captain of the Bastille, who was present.

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[1] Henri IV. had remitted the confiscation of Biron’s property pronounced by the Parlement, so that the marshal was able to provide for this child.

"Then the executioner entered the room and said that the hour was past and that he must come. Biron answered that he ought to have had warning of it. 'Let us go! let us go!' said he. On the stairs he met the Civil Lieutenant, to whom he said: 'Monsieur le Lieutenant, you have very wicked guests, and if you do not take care of yourself, they will ruin you'—intending to speak of the Seigneur de la Fin and of the Vidame de Chartres, his nephew. When he was near the scaffold, those who were there—about seventy persons—having made some noise, he said: 'What are so many rascals and beggars doing there?' Then he mounted the scaffold, followed by the doctors (in theology) Magnan[1] and Garnier, a valet of the King's wardrobe, who had been given him to attend him in prison, and the executioner. But this man, having wished to lay his hand on him, he told him to go back and to refrain from touching him otherwise than with the sword, demanding of him only what he had to do. Then he took off his doublet and gave it to the valet. The executioner offered him a white handkerchief that he might blindfold himself; but he wished to use his own, which, being found to be too short, he asked for that of the executioner. He knelt down, but rose again abruptly with a cry of distress, demanding: 'Is there no mercy for me?' And again he told the executioner to draw back, and not to irritate him and drive him to desperation, if he did not wish him to strangle him and more than half of those who were present; several of whom would have wished to be away from there, hearing this man, who had not been bound, talk in this fashion. Finally, he knelt down and bandaged his eyes again, and immediately rose again, saying that he wished for the last time to see the sky, since there was no pardon for him, and he must never look upon it again. For the third time he knelt down, but while he was raising his hand to remove his bandage again, and was telling the executioner not to cut off his head, as he had not said his *In manus*, the executioner delivered his blow. Biron had 'two fingers injured,' but the head fell to the ground,[1] from which it was picked up and placed in a white shroud with the body, which in the evening was buried at Saint-Paul."

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[1] Magnan, or Megna, as he is called elsewhere, was the curé of Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs, already mentioned.

Biron had died without making any full and public confession, and Henri IV. was probably glad that such was the case. He had learned all that it concerned him to know from La Fin,[2] and from the craven terror of the Comte d'Auvergne, who, a king's son though he was, not only divulged everything he knew, but even offered to play the part of a spy and to continue to communicate with his confederates abroad in order to disclose their plans to the Government. The King had no desire for a war with Spain and Savoy at this juncture,[3] nor to disturb the tranquillity which France was enjoying after so many years of turmoil by punishing the great nobles who had been compromised in Biron's intrigues. And this was undoubtedly the reason why at the marshal's trial only a portion of the evidence which was in the hands of the Government was produced. Had everything been made public, war could hardly have been avoided.

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[1] According to a manuscript account of the execution preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale, "the executioner struck so terrible a blow that the head flew so far as the middle of the courtyard."

[2] La Fin duly received the reward promised him for the betrayal of his employer, but he did not live many years to enjoy it. "On April 20, 1607," reports L'Estoile, "the Seigneur de la Fin was attacked in broad daylight, at the end of the Pont-Neuf, by twelve or fifteen unknown men, well mounted and armed. He was borne to the ground, covered with smoke and blood, and the assassins, after firing ten or twelve pistol shots, without difficulty or any hindrance whatever, left the town, which they traversed in a body, at full gallop, sword in one hand, reins and pistol in the other, without being followed or pursued for twenty-four hours."

[3] The Ambassadors of Philip IV. and Charles Emmanuel waited upon the King to express their masters' satisfaction that he had crushed so dangerous a conspiracy, and Henri IV. gravely thanked them for these hypocritical assurances.

On October 2 Henriette's contemptible brother was liberated from the Bastille, "the King having accorded him honour and life; after a warning of the miserable state into which he had precipitated himself, the grave error which he had perpetrated, and an exhortation to take care of himself for the future."[1] The leniency with which he was treated and which, as we shall presently see, he was so grossly to abuse, was very far from meeting with the approval of the public, whose dissatisfaction was expressed in the following verses:

"O grand Dieu, quelle iniquité
Deux prisonniers ont mérité
La peine du même supplice :
L'un qui a toujours combattu
Meurt redouté [pour] sa vertu.
L'autre vit par l'amour du vice."[2]

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[1] L'Estoile.

[2] *Ibid.*

CHAPTER VIII

Marie de' Medici flatly declines to believe that Madame de Verneuil is innocent of any connection with the conspiracy of Biron—The relations between the two ladies more acrimonious than ever—Unhappy position of Henri IV.—The Queen gives birth to a daughter, and Henriette follows her example, two months later—Fury of Marie de' Medici—Terrible scene with the King—Henri IV. legitimates his son by Henriette, who is created Duc de Verneuil—Journey of the King to Metz and Nancy—On his return to Fontainebleau, he is taken seriously ill, but recovers—Alarm of the Queen and the favourite, each of whom fears the enmity of the other in the event of Henri IV.'s death—Secret interview between them, in which Madame de Verneuil undertakes to break off her relations with the King—The marchioness begs to be excused the honour of receiving his Majesty—" Do not insist; it is useless "—The King suspects that a love-affair with the Comte de Soissons is the real cause of the lady's tardy scruples—Incident which serves to confirm his suspicions—He orders Henriette to retire to Verneuil—But, finding that he cannot do without her, resolves to make his peace—And presents her with a house at Fontainebleau—Wrath of the Queen, who declares publicly that she shall refuse to receive Madame de Verneuil—Henri IV. is warned by Concini that the favourite's life is in danger—Henriette, pretending to be greatly alarmed, demands of the King a place of surety to which she can retire—And, on his refusal to accede to her wishes, withdraws to Verneuil in a passion—Henri IV. begs Sully to go to Normandy to endeavour to accommodate the quarrel—Arrival of M. de Sigogne, an ambassador from Henriette—The King, warned that the marchioness is engaged in intrigues with Spain, goes himself to Verneuil to demand an explanation—A useless journey—Interview of Sully with the favourite—Duplicity of Henriette checkmated by the Minister's precautions—Futile efforts of the King to induce the Queen to receive Madame de Verneuil at Fontainebleau—He spends four days in Paris with his mistress—Short truce, followed by renewal of hostilities—Henriette, in order to punish Henri IV. for having sacrificed her interests to the enmity of the Queen, refuses to receive him any longer in private, under religious pretexts.

MARIE DE' MEDICI had naturally followed with intense interest the progress of the affair in which Madame de Verneuil's half-brother was so deeply implicated and which, she fondly hoped, would prove the ruin of the marchioness herself. Great was the Queen's wrath on learning of the scheme for placing her rival's son on the throne instead of the Dauphin, in the event of the King's death, and her disappointment was proportionally bitter when she was informed that no evidence was forthcoming to connect Madame de Verneuil in any way with the conspiracy, and that the Comte d'Auvergne would appear to have acted entirely without his sister's knowledge. Her Majesty flatly declined to be persuaded of the innocence of the marchioness, and, as she did not hesitate to allow her opinion to be known, the relations between the two ladies became more acrimonious than ever. The King, fired at from both sides, placed between her whom he loved still and who was emerging haughty and triumphant from the peril which had threatened her, and her who, at least for appearances' sake, he was obliged to treat with respect, could no longer find peace. He was being well punished for his amorous delinquencies, "and the affairs of women ended by occupying more of his time than those of the realm."[1]

Matters were not mended by two interesting domestic events which occurred during the ensuing winter. On November 22, 1602, Marie de' Medici gave birth to a daughter,[2] and two months later, January 21, 1603, Madame de Verneuil also presented his Majesty with a second pledge of her affection, a girl who was named Gabrielle.[3] The Queen, already deeply incensed by the news that the King was about to legitimate his son by Henriette, was beside herself with anger. In a terrible scene, she overwhelmed her husband with the most violent reproaches, and if Sully had not seized her wrist, she would have struck him.[1] Nor did the legitimation of her son[2] serve to placate Madame de Verneuil more than momentarily; on the contrary, it seemed to have made her more haughty and more dissatisfied than ever, and she complained incessantly to Henri IV. of the enmity of the Queen, which prevented her from assuming the position at Court which she considered was rightfully hers. All the King's rendezvous with his mistress passed in reproaches. "They no longer make love except by grumbling," wrote Sully.

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[1] M. Charles Merki, "La Marquise de Verneuil et la mort d'Henri IV."

[2] Élisabeth de France, who was married in 1615 to Philip IV. of Spain.

[3] "The wife and the mistress being continually at war," observes Lescure, "the King had no other resource than to make each of them a mother alternately. He could never breathe freely except between two pregnancies, and it was only the satiety of love which brought him back to politics."—"Les Amours d'Henri IV."

In order to escape for a while from these domestic storms, which were rendering his life intolerable, Henri IV., learning that trouble had broken out at Metz, where the citizens had risen against Soboles, lieutenant of their governor, the Duc d'Épernon, and were besieging him in the citadel, in which he had taken refuge, decided to proceed thither in person to restore order. Since the Queen, when at a distance from her detested rival, was, as a rule, comparatively amiable, he invited her to accompany him, an offer which Marie gladly accepted, believing that her departure with the King could not fail to mortify Madame de Verneuil.

From Metz the King went to Nancy to see his sister the Duchess of Bar, and then returned to Fontainebleau. During the journey, "thanks to the tranquillity which he had at last recovered," his health had been excellent, but having stayed very late one evening in the gardens of Fontainebleau, he caught a severe chill, which was followed by an acute attack of renal colic, a complaint to which he appears to have been very subject in his later years. His condition appeared so serious that Sully, Villeroy and the Chancellor were sent for in all haste, and Henri became much alarmed.

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[1] If we are to believe an unpublished account of the relations between Henri IV. and Marie de' Medici in the Bibliothèque Nationale, this was not the only occasion on which her Majesty forgot herself in this fashion. "It was impossible," says the writer, "to persuade her to live peaceably and dutifully with the King. . . . One evening, after a quarrel, she sprang out of bed and scratched his face."—MSS. Fontanieu 446-447, cited by M. Merki.

[2] The letters of legitimation, which gave the little Duc de Verneuil, by which title the boy was now to be known, the right to possess property, to inherit estates and to fill any office or dignity in the gift of the Crown, were registered by the Parlement on February 18, 1603, and by the Chambre des Comptes on the 25th. It is probable that Henri IV. would have taken this step before had it not been for the doubts regarding the child's paternity which had been aroused by the affair of the Joinville letters.

"Pray God that I recover from this," said he to the Queen, who was unremitting in her attentions, "and I will act in such a way that in the future you will be obeyed and respected."

Henri IV.'s splendid constitution, however, triumphed, and on the third day he began to mend. But the danger so quickly escaped might return, and, in view of this, the Queen believed herself obliged to employ more discretion in her attitude towards Madame de Verneuil. She was aware that, in the event of the King dying before the authority of the Crown was firmly re-established—and how very far from re-established it was recent events had shown only too plainly—her position as Regent for her little son would be full of difficulties and dangers. It would therefore be most imprudent to aggravate these by a mortal quarrel with an ambitious and unscrupulous woman like Henriette d'Entragues, whose pretensions, if supported by some of the great nobles for their own selfish ends, would constitute a formidable menace to her authority. And so, for the moment, policy put jealousy to silence, and she resolved to tolerate the marchioness's return to Court, about which, before the journey to Metz, she had refused to hear a word, and even to treat her in public with apparent kindness.

It is probable that Marie would not have found it so easy to arrive at such a decision, had not Henriette, perhaps equally disquieted at the possibility of the King's early demise, which would leave her exposed to the resentment of the Queen—as the death of Henri II. had left Diane de Poitiers to that of Catherine de' Medici, and without the powerful connections which had saved

Diane from too glaring a disgrace—judged it advisable to attempt a reconciliation.

"Madame," said the marchioness at the secret interview which the Queen had, at her earnest solicitation, accorded her, "you have so often given me a bad reception that I dared not come to pay my respects to you. It is a long time, I am able to assure you, since the King has visited me, and, by the grace of God, I shall guard myself so well in the future that your Majesty will have every reason to restore me your favour."

"If such is the case," replied the Queen, "I shall treat you as my own sister."

Now, it was perfectly true, as Marie was no doubt aware, that the King had not visited the favourite since his illness, for the very good and sufficient reason that his physicians had, not only forbidden him to hunt or to indulge in any form of violent exercise, but had recommended that for some time he should "abstain from any woman, even from the Queen." But the real reason why Madame de Verneuil was so willing that this abstinence, at least so far as it affected her, should be prolonged was that she was at that moment engaged in a love-affair with the Comte de Soissons, who had perhaps succeeded other admirers whose names history does not mention.

The marchioness kept her word, and when Henry IV., having been permitted to resume his ordinary mode of life, came to visit her, he was informed, to his astonishment and mortification, that Madame la Marquise begged to be excused the honour of receiving his Majesty. He went away, but, not being the kind of man to be easily discouraged, he watched his opportunity, and one morning contrived to surprise the lady before she had risen.

"What brings you here at this hour?" cried she angrily. "One of us two is going to be deceived. I want never to see you again, for I have received nothing but ill from you."

" Madame," exclaimed the King, " I deserve neither these reproaches nor this reception."

" Do not insist ; it is useless," rejoined the marchioness dryly.

Knowing from sad experience that when she was in an ill humour it was waste of breath to argue with her, his Majesty took his departure in high dudgeon, since he did not doubt that there was some new love-affair to account for these tardy scruples. His suspicions pointed to his kinsman, the Comte de Soissons, whose intimacy with Henriette had already occasioned him some little uneasiness, and an incident which occurred shortly afterwards served to confirm them.

Quite recently the King had signed, without paying too much attention to them, several decrees creating new taxes, from which the Comte de Soissons was to profit in a great measure, and also Madame de Verneuil. Among them was one imposing a duty of fifteen sols on every bale of cloth entering or leaving the kingdom, which the King supposed would produce at the most 50,000 livres. But when he consulted Sully on the matter, the Surintendant des Finances had little difficulty in showing him that he would be making M. de Soissons, Madame de Verneuil, and other interested parties a present of something like twenty times that sum, to the great detriment of the commerce of several provinces. And he strongly advised the King to withdraw the edict imposing it, and not to oblige the Parlement to ratify it.[1]

The mortified Comte de Soissons, after vainly endeavouring to induce the Minister to abandon his opposition, persuaded Madame de Verneuil to go to him and plead their common cause. On arriving at the Arsenal, where Sully resided as Grand Master of the Artillery, which post he combined with that of Surintendant, she found the Minister on the point of starting for the Louvre, " with a little memorandum rolled round his finger."

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[1] The Parlement would appear to have remonstrated already against the tax.

" What have you there ? " demanded the marchioness with a flippant air, which irritated Sully, for he replied tartly :

" Fine things, Madame, in which you are not the last." And he showed her a list of edicts establishing new taxes, all very burdensome for the people, and the names of the greedy courtiers for whose benefit they were being imposed. Her own was the sixth.

" Well, what do you intend to do about all this ? "

" I am going," was the answer, " to remonstrate with the King in favour of the poor people, who will soon be ruined if such burdens are laid upon them, without counting that his Majesty will be obliged to renounce his taxes, since there will be nothing left for him to receive."

" Truly," remarked the lady sarcastically, " it will be singular if he listens to you and ignores so many people of quality to satisfy your caprices. Towards whom would you wish the King to be generous, if it is not towards those whose names are written here : towards his cousins, his relatives, his mistresses ? "

Sully replied that there would be no objection to that provided his Majesty took the money from his own purse ; but to be generous at the expense of the merchants, artisans and labourers was a different matter altogether. " For they," he added pointedly, " are those who support the King and us all, and who are well content with a single master, without having so many cousins and relatives and mistresses to keep."

In great wrath, the marchioness departed, returned to the Comte de Soissons, and informed him of the insolent manner in which the Minister had treated her. The tale lost nothing in the telling ; indeed, to such a degree did she distort what Sully had said that the count believed that aspersions had been cast upon his honour, and hurried away to the King to demand justice upon the man who, he said, had grossly insulted him.

And he declared that, if this were not forthcoming, he would have his life.

Henri IV., however, took the matter very lightly, and appeared to think that his kinsman was making a mountain out of what was probably only a mole-hill. Soissons begged him to believe him, adding that he had never lied. The King smiled.

" If that were the case, my cousin," said he, " you would not belong to our House. But, since it is another who has informed you, tell me who it is and what has been said. I will then consider the matter and give you satisfaction, if justice requires it."

But the count, exasperated though he was against Sully, did not think it prudent to bring Madame de Verneuil's name into the matter, and answered that he had promised not to mention the name of his informant. The King rejoined that, in that case, he should refuse to believe anything until he had heard what the accused Minister had to say himself about the affair, and he sent Fouquet La Varenne to the Arsenal to ascertain what had really happened. Then, turning to Soissons, he inquired abruptly :

" Do you know, Count, what is said of you ? It is that you are on the best of terms with the marchioness."

" On my faith, Sire," cried the other, completely taken aback, " it is an infamous calumny ! "

Henri IV. pretended to be satisfied with this denial and did not question him further on the subject ; and Soissons withdrew very ill at ease.

Presently La Varenne returned and reported that Sully had told him that the only person to whom he had lately spoken concerning the proposed new taxes was Madame de Verneuil, who had called upon him at the Arsenal ; that he had certainly told her that he intended to use all his influence with the King to persuade him to withdraw them, and that, in consequence, the marchioness had left him very displeased, but that, so far from having referred disrespectfully to the Comte de Soissons, he had not even mentioned that prince's name.

The King, who was well aware of his mistress's capacity for making mischief, began to laugh.

"Oh!" said he, "we need not inquire any further about the cause of this misunderstanding, since Madame de Verneuil is mixed up in it. She has such a long tongue, and is so full of spite and invention, that to the last word she will have added a hundred, nay, a thousand."

And he sent La Varenne back to the Arsenal to assure Sully of his friendship and, at the same time, to recommend him, as a precautionary measure, not to go out unless well guarded, until the difference between him and the Comte de Soissons had been accommodated.

"If I lose him," he observed, "I should lose with him much more than what he can dispense in order to be well protected."

Finding his suspicions in regard to Henriette and Soissons in part justified, Henri IV. determined to read the lady a much-needed lesson. He had promised her the sum of 100,000 écus, presumably in consideration of her consenting to resume their former relations, with which, it appears, she proposed to acquire the county of Joigny. That same evening, however, he said to her:

"Do not reckon any more on the hundred thousand écus I promised you. Others, whom you know well, will be happy to procure them for you."

"As you grow old," retorted the marchioness, "you become insupportably jealous. There is no way to live in peace with you."

"Ah well, if that is so, return to Verneuil. That is what you had better do."

And he turned his back on her.

The Vert-Galant had presumed too much on his strength. A very brief separation from his unworthy mistress sufficed to convince him that he could not get on without her, and he decided to take the first opportunity of making his peace. In February 1604, his sister the Duchess of Bar died, and two houses, one at Fontainebleau and the other at Saint-Germain, the use of which he had given her for life, reverted to him. The King at once offered one of these houses to Madame de Verneuil, who condescended to accept it as a sign that she had forgiven him ; the other he presented to the Queen.

The sequel showed that in making such a division his Majesty had been far from happily inspired. The Queen was infuriated at the idea that she was expected to share the King's bounty with her rival, and declared before the whole Court that she should absolutely refuse to receive this woman who was treated as her equal. Once more it was open war between the wife and the mistress.

From insults Marie de' Medici passed to threats, and must have opened her heart to her confidante, Leonora Galigaï, for one day Concini, who desired to stand well with the King, came to warn him that his favourite's life was in danger, and that it would be well for him to take precautions for her safety.[1] Henriette was quick to perceive how a warning coming from so reliable a source might be turned to her advantage, and pretending to be terribly alarmed, she demanded of the King the strongholds which the Duchess of Bar had had in Normandy, in order that she might take refuge in one of them. The King offered her Caen, on condition, however, that the Marquis de Bellefonds should command there. But the marchioness feared that this governor might one day become her gaoler, and fell back upon other places situated in Poitou. To this the King refused to consent, upon which she flew into a furious passion and, declaring that he wished to expose her to the vengeance of the Queen, took herself off to Verneuil. For the time being the rupture was complete.

Henri IV. went, as was his custom on these occasions, to Sully to bewail his sad lot and to ask for advice. He never seemed capable of understanding that he was the architect of his own misfortunes, and that his deplorable folly and want of tact in his dealings with women were alone responsible for these miserable domestic squabbles which were rendering his life unbearable. After complaining bitterly of the conduct of Henriette and saying all the evil possible about her, he suddenly veered round and began to expatiate upon her good qualities and to compare her with the Queen, very much to the disadvantage of the latter.

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[1] It is very doubtful if Marie de' Medici ever had any serious intention of procuring the assassination of her rival or that Concini and his wife really believed that she had. According to the Cardinal de Richelieu, who for so long enjoyed the Queen's entire confidence in later years, her threats against Henriette were " merely a feint, it being certain that she had no design, on this occasion, save to inspire her with the fear of harm which she did not intend to do her."—" Mémoires " (édit. Michaud), I., 8.

" She is such an agreeable companion, when it pleases her," said he ; " she always has some jest to make me laugh. I find nothing of that kind with the Queen ; she lends herself neither to my tastes nor to my humour. Quite the contrary, if I approach her familiarly to caress her, she gives me so cold a reception that I go to seek adventures elsewhere."

It was but too true, as Sully was well aware. Time had only served to confirm the unfavourable impression which, on her arrival in France, Marie de' Medici had made both upon the King and the Court. As the years passed, her features grew coarser and her figure more ponderous, while her obstinacy, her selfishness, her shrewish and sulky disposition, and her disdainful and even arrogant manner became only the more marked. There was nothing about her to attract, and much to repel, a husband like Henri IV.,[1] who, if he had not found the consolation which he needed in the society of the sprightly and bewitching Henriette, always irresistible, as we know, when she chose to exercise her fascinations, would assuredly have sought it in some other direction.

Then the King went on to complain of the animosity which his wife had conceived towards his natural children—" his bastards," as she habitually called them—

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[1] The remark attributed by Richelieu, in his " Mémoires," to Henry IV., and quoted by so many historians, that " if she were not his wife, he would give all he possessed to have her for his mistress," is probably apocryphal. If it is not, then surely it cannot have been spoken seriously !

and of the benefits which she heaped upon the Galigaï and Concini, whom he accused of being spies of the Grand Duke of Tuscany.

Sully pointed out that the remedy was in his Majesty's own hands, and that if he were to insist on these persons and certain other members of the Queen's Italian entourage returning to their own country, he would no doubt find the Queen much more docile in the future. But the King shook his head.

"I do not even wish to appear to desire it," said he, "for with this troop of Italians, who are so vindictive, it would be to shorten my life by suspicions and misgivings worse than death."

With that he returned to the subject of Madame de Verneuil and begged Sully to intervene and persuade the lady to listen to reason.

The part of Love's Ambassador was, however, scarcely calculated to appeal to this severe Mentor, and he begged to be excused from undertaking such a mission. The King, somewhat mortified by his refusal, took his departure; but he was quite resolved to make advances to Henriette, and the same evening wrote to Sully requesting him to reconsider his decision. However, at the moment when he was about to send him this letter another person intervened in the affair. This was M. de Sigogne, governor of Dieppe, who combined with that office the profession of a writer of erotic verse and the post of confidential adviser to Madame de Verneuil, and had come from Normandy to offer his services to accommodate the quarrel between the King and the marchioness.

After a short conversation with Sigogne, the King sent him to the Arsenal and wrote at the bottom of his letter to Sully: "I am sending M. de Sigogne to you and to Madame de Verneuil, seeing that, as she places entire confidence in him, she believes that you will advance nothing of your own, as she has sometimes tried to persuade me."[1]

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[1] "Lettres-Missives."

The next day Sully went to the Louvre, where he found the King in a very ill humour. On inquiring the cause, his Majesty informed him that it was suspected that the Comte d'Auvergne, who, it will be remembered, had offered to continue his correspondence with Spain and Savoy in order to betray the designs of these Courts to the French Government—a proposal which, after some hesitation, the King had accepted, so far as the former country was concerned—was deceiving him, and that Henriette was also engaged in intrigues with the Spaniards. Indeed, certain persons had even offered to show him letters and produce witnesses to prove that she had been won over by the Court of Madrid. The Queen, learning of this, had taken advantage of it to pester him and to urge him to deal rigorously with his mistress and compel her to surrender the promise of marriage. He had therefore decided to proceed himself to Verneuil and demand an explanation from the marchioness.

No sooner did he find himself in Henriette's presence, than the amorous monarch appears to have thought only of employing the reports which had reached him of her dealings with Spain as a means to persuade her to return to him, declaring that such was his affection for her that, if she would only make a confession, all should be forgiven. But the marchioness haughtily replied that she had nothing to confess, since the rumours of which he spoke were a gross calumny; and she begged him, as the greatest favour which he was able to accord her, not to come to see her again, since these visits served only to draw upon her the frenzied hatred of the Queen and to place her life in danger. Angry and disappointed, the King then demanded the restoration of the promise of marriage which, he said, would henceforth be of no use to her, to which she answered insolently that he might seek it elsewhere, since she would never give it him.[1]

Henri IV.'s visit, therefore, appeared only to have embittered the situation; but, on his arrival at Fontainebleau, to which he proceeded from Normandy, he reverted to his first idea of employing Sully as mediator, and sent Sigogne to him with the following note :

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[1] Sully: "Œconomies royales."

" My friend Sigogne will tell you my intention as to what I desire you to say to Madame de Verneuil, apart from what I told you recently on that subject, better than I could write it. The discourse would be too long, but in a word : '*aut Cæsar, aut nihil.*' "[1]

Much against his will, Sully went to see the marchioness, who was now at her hôtel in Paris, and was informed by her that she was firmly resolved to break off all intercourse with the King. And she charged him to inform his Majesty of her determination.

The Minister returned to the Arsenal and wrote a letter to the King, giving a summary of the conversation which he had just had with Madame de Verneuil. But, since he was aware that that lady had very little compunction about denying what she had said, if it happened to suit her convenience, he took the precaution of sending her the letter by one of his secretaries to know whether she approved of it. And, at the same time, he instructed the bearer on no account to accept a verbal answer.

Henriette read and re-read the letter, which, she admitted, was in substance an exact report of the interview. But she wished to modify certain expressions which appeared to her a little too harsh, and pointed out to the secretary the alterations which were to be made. But the latter, faithful to his instructions, pleaded that his memory was sometimes at fault, and begged her to put her answer into writing. The marchioness perceived the trap, but it was scarcely possible for her to refuse so reasonable a request, and, taking a pen, she wrote to Sully :

" Monsieur, I have seen the letter which you have been pleased to send me, which I find such as I could have desired, and for which I am greatly your debtor and beg you to believe that I shall be eternally your servant. It seems to me that there is only one thing which might be found harsh, which is that you tell him (the King) that I beg him to consent to see me occasionally, '*mais sans aucune privauté ni familiarité particulière.*' I entreat you to substitute that I beg him not to ask anything of me which may be prejudicial to me. . . ."

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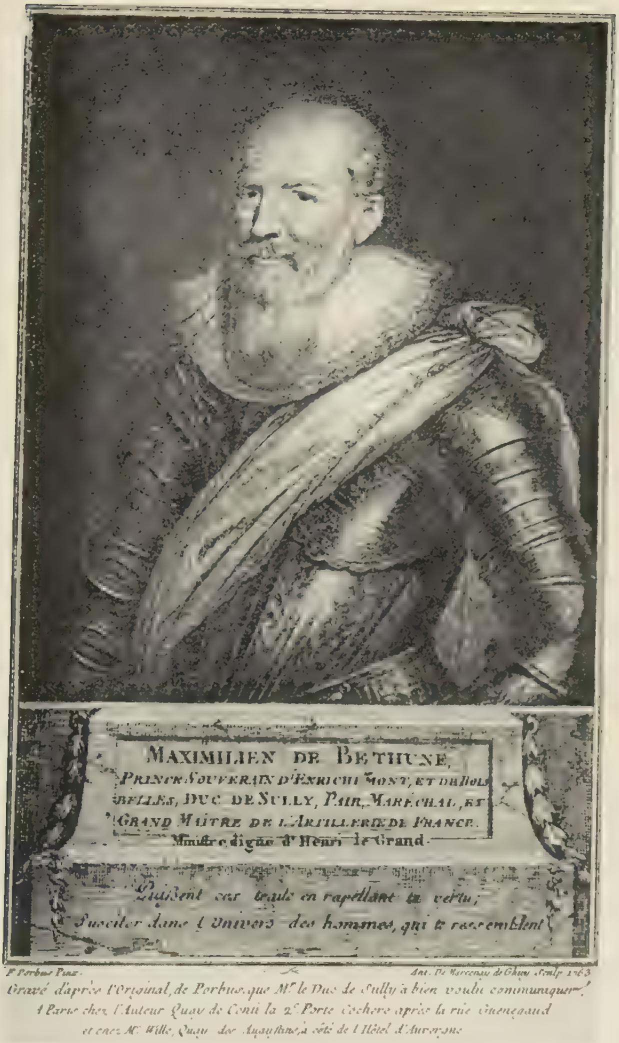
[1] " Lettres-Missives," Letter of April 14, 1604.

Sully made the alteration which the marchioness desired and sent the amended letter to the King, who, in the bitterness of his disappointment, wrote to the Minister:

"Since Madame de Verneuil is resolved upon what you tell me, I am also upon what I have told you. On Monday I shall write to acquaint her with my intention and shall make her see that I have more power over myself than people say."

Henri IV., in fact, seemed quite resigned to the idea of breaking with his mistress. But Henriette had no intention of allowing matters to go so far as that, and knew her royal admirer too well to have any fear that she would be unable to bring him to her feet whenever it suited her purpose.

Instead of writing to her, the King came to see her, and so angry was he, that she recognized at once that the limits of his forbearance had been reached and that it was necessary to change her tactics. She therefore boldly declared that the stipulations which had caused him so much irritation had neither been written nor dictated by her, and hinted that Sully had deliberately invented them. This had the effect of diverting the monarch's indignation from his mistress to his Minister, and he took himself off to the Arsenal and began to upbraid Sully with having falsified the conversation he had had with Madame de Verneuil, whom, he knew,


MAXIMILIEN DE BETHUNE,
PRINCE SOUVERAIN D'ENRICHEMONT, ET DE BOIS
BELLES, DUC DE SULLY, PAIR, MARECHAL, ET
GRAND MAITRE DE L'ARTILLERIE DE FRANCE.
Ministre digne d'Henri le Grand.
Puissent ces traits en rapellant ta vertu,
Susciter dans l'Univers des hommes, qui te ressemblent.
F. Porbus Pinx.
Ant. De Marcenay de Ghuy Sculp 1763
Gravé d'après l'Original, de Porbus, que Mr. le Duc de Sully a bien voulu communiquer.
A Paris chez l'Auteur Quay de Conti la 2e Porte Cochere après la rüe Guenegaud
et chez Mr. Wille, Quay des Augustins, à côté de l'Hôtel d'Auvergne

Maximilien de Bethune, Duc de Sully.

[*To face p.* 134.

he had never been able to endure, in order to separate him from her. The Surintendant, however, had, of course, kept the letter which the marchioness had written him a few days before, and, begging his Majesty to excuse him for a moment, he fetched it from his cabinet and placed it in his hands. The King read the letter, and, finding himself disarmed, hastened to make the *amende honorable.*

"Good-bye, my friend," said he, as he rose to go, "love me well, for I love you as an honourable man, in whose mouth I see plainly there is nothing false. Thus, whatever I may have said on my arrival, I could not believe that the malice came from your side, knowing the openness of your heart and the extravagant and mischief-making mind with which we have to deal. And, nevertheless, you have been well advised to take such precaution as you have shown me against her wiles."[1]

Such is Sully's own version of this incident, which has been accepted without comment by the Comte de la Ferrière and other historians of the love-affairs of the Vert-Galant. But it is doubtful whether it is altogether accurate, for, as M. Merki very justly points out, in reporting episodes in which he himself is concerned, Sully is not always the most veracious of chroniclers and does not hesitate to give himself the leading part.[2]

Anyway, as he sadly confesses, his exposure of the perfidy of "that malignant wasp"—it is thus that he stigmatizes Henriette—appears to have had singularly little effect upon Henri IV. For when the marchioness returned to Verneuil, whither she judged it more prudent to retire again for a while, the lovelorn monarch, finding himself quite unable to live any longer without her, wrote letter after letter begging, nay, entreating, her to come to Fontainebleau and to bring her children.

Henriette finally consented, on the understanding that he should obtain the Queen's consent to receive her. But for some days he could not summon up sufficient courage to mention the matter to his consort; indeed, it was not until the marchioness was actually on her way that he timidly informed the Queen of her approaching arrival and begged her to receive her courteously.

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[1] Sully, "Œconomies royales."

[2] "La Marquise de Verneuil et la mort d'Henri IV."

Marie de' Medici, who had been flattering herself that she was rid of her rival for some time to come, was furious at this unexpected demand, but, repressing her wrath, she inquired with an affectation of indifference:

"Has the marchioness, then, decided to bring you her children to be brought up at Saint-Germain with the others?"

"It is I," answered Henri IV., "who have invited her to bring her children. I propose to ask her to leave them at Saint-Germain, but I can do nothing contrary to their mother's wishes."

The Queen said nothing further, but, the evening before Henriette was expected, she sent Sillery[1] to the King to inform him that she should refuse to receive her.

"Ah well!" dryly remarked the Béarnais, to whom this announcement did not come as a surprise. "Sillery, go back to the Queen and make her understand that I intend to be obeyed. With her ways of behaving, she will be the cause of the Dauphin's ruin. The hatred which she entertains for the marchioness will force me to accord her what I have always refused her up to the present: a government and fortified places."

Sillery returned to report the King's answer to Marie de' Medici, who retorted that if his Majesty surrendered to such demands on the part of Madame de Verneuil, he alone would be the cause of the Dauphin's ruin. And she expressed her astonishment that he had not long ago comprehended " the diabolical machinations of that woman."

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[1] Nicolas Bruslart, Marquis de Sillery (1544-1624). He was one of the most skilful diplomatists of his time, and in 1599 was sent to Florence to negotiate the marriage of Henri IV. with Marie de' Medici. This was probably one of the reasons why the Queen appears to have regarded him with more favour than any of her husband's counsellors. He was created Keeper of the Seals at the end of 1604 and Chancellor of France in September 1607.

In reporting to Henri IV. this haughty rejoinder, Sillery counselled him not to speak to the Queen on the matter again that night. He followed this advice, and, not a little to her Majesty's surprise, took his place in the nuptial couch in silence and spoke never a word until he woke on the following morning, when he said to her :

" *Ma mie*, I am going to meet the marchioness, and, since it is not your pleasure to receive her, I shall lecture her in such fashion that she will do nothing to the Dauphin's disadvantage."

So soon as he was dressed, he mounted his horse and repaired to the inn where Henriette was to stop for dinner. From there he wrote to Sully bidding him make a last effort to induce the Queen to receive her rival, " were it only one single day, in order not to oblige him to do worse." Very much embarrassed by such a commission, the Minister took counsel with Villeroy and Sillery, and all three went together to the Queen to endeavour to obtain this last concession.

At first Marie de' Medici showed herself intractable, but Sully, according to his own account, pleaded so eloquently with her that she finally relented and promised to write her husband " a kind letter " in which she would " set forth her grievances." This she did and at considerable length, declaring that " she had neither patience nor courage to endure the disrespectful language of Madame de Verneuil ; " to hear her elevate " her bastards " to the rank of " Sons of France," and " to learn of her underhand dealings in concert with her father and brother, which, however, they were permitted to carry on with impunity." However, the main thing was that she gave the Ministers to understand that she consented to receive " that woman " for one single day.

Then, having adjured them "to compel their master to respect her, as she had the right and deserved to be respected," she dismissed them.

Meanwhile, Henri IV., having met Madame de Verneuil, was anxiously awaiting Sully's reply. But so much time had been wasted by that Minister in consulting his colleagues, endeavouring to bring the Queen to a more reasonable frame of mind and waiting while the latter was setting forth her grievances, that long before it was on its way to the King, his Majesty had lost all patience and concluded that Sully's mission had failed. Accordingly, he sent his mistress's luggage to Paris, and soon afterwards entered the marchioness's coach and proceeded with her to the capital.

On the way, however, prudence reasserted itself, and, instead of remaining in Paris, he went to Saint-Germain to see his little daughter Élisabeth, who was ill. But his good resolutions did not last long, and, returning to Paris, he spent four whole days with Henriette, who, overjoyed at the opportunity of avenging upon the Queen the latter's scornful refusal to receive her, took care to show herself several times in public in the company of her lover.

Never had the situation been so strained, and an open rupture between the royal pair appeared far from improbable.[1] Happily, Marie de' Medici suffered herself to be guided by those who hinted that, if the King had violated decorum, her own obstinacy had contributed to it, and that she would do well to hold out the olive branch. Accordingly, she wrote to her erring husband, who was officially supposed to be at Saint-Germain, in quite an amicable tone and without making the least allusion to Madame de Verneuil or to his stay in Paris. "This letter caused the King to reflect; it had more effect upon him than any threat would have had. Of his own free will he sent the marchioness back to Verneuil, and took the road back to the conjugal roof. The Queen received him as though nothing had happened; he showed himself profoundly touched by it and rewarded her by tender caresses."[1]

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[1] Richelieu declares that on one occasion, at Fontainebleau, Henri IV. informed the Queen that "if she were not willing to live more amicably with him and alter her behaviour, he would be constrained to send her back to Florence with all that she had brought from that country."

Peace was thus re-established, but it was only a very short truce. For Henriette had not been neglectful of her interests while in Paris and had obtained from the King, so enraptured at this reunion with his mistress that he could deny her nothing, a promise to approach the widowed Duchesse de Longueville, with the view of affiancing the little duke—a Prince of the Blood—to the marchioness's daughter. Marie de' Medici, when informed by the King of the matrimonial arrangement which was contemplated, was even more furious than she had been at the time of the unfortunate division of the Duchess of Bar's property, and "had henceforth but one idea, to ruin at any price her rival." Sully, who was on the point of starting for Poitou, where affairs of importance in connection with his department called for his presence, was obliged to defer his journey in order to restore some degree of harmony in the Royal Household. This he succeeded in bringing about on the King agreeing to pursue the matter of the Longueville marriage no further.

But to placate the wife was to incense the mistress, and Henriette was not the kind of woman who would tamely submit to such a defeat. The Court had now returned to the Louvre, while the marchioness was at her hôtel in Paris, and she at once declared war upon Marie de' Medici, who, on her part, hastened to accept the challenge and redoubled her animosity towards her eternal enemy. At the same time, in order to punish the King for his weakness in sacrificing her interests to the enmity of the Queen—as though the unfortunate monarch was not being punished sufficiently already by all the unpleasantness which this renewal of hostilities entailed—she declined to receive him any longer in private under religious pretexts, declaring that she intended to spend the rest of her life in penitence and to retire into a convent. And, to prove that this was no idle talk, she caused Mass to be said every day at her hôtel by her confessor, a Capuchin called Père Ange or Archange,[1] at which a certain Madame de Boulloncourt, who is believed to have had an *amourette* with Henri IV. in her younger days, was a regular attendant. Then, pretending once more to be in mortal fear of the hatred of Marie de' Medici, she besought the King to authorize her to seek an asylum for herself and her children in some foreign country, and gave him to understand that she contemplated taking refuge in England, with Edme Stuart, Duke of Lennox, who had married her aunt, Catherine de Balzac. Weary of all these quarrels, Henri IV. gave his consent to her departure, though he wished the children to be left with him. The marchioness did not, however, avail herself of this permission—probably she never seriously intended to leave France, unless it were for a short while, with the intention of returning in triumph on her own terms—for it was at that moment that a new conspiracy was discovered, and, on this occasion, there could be no reasonable doubt as to her complicity.

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[1] La Ferrière.

[1] See page 12 *supra*.

CHAPTER IX

The Conspiracy of the Entragues—L'Hoste, one of the secretaries of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, discovered to be betraying official secrets to Spain—His flight and death—Alarm of the Comte d'Auvergne, whose instrument L'Hoste has been—In order to divert the suspicions of the King, he informs his Majesty that Madame de Verneuil is deceiving him with the Duc de Bellegarde—Stormy scene in Henri IV.'s cabinet at the Louvre—Auvergne leaves the Court and retires to his estates—Arrest of Thomas Morgan, a Spanish agent, and discovery of a conspiracy in which Auvergne and the Comte d'Entragues are implicated—Henriette, when questioned by the King, denies all knowledge of her father's intrigues—Entragues is summoned to Court, and, on the favourite's advice, makes a partial confession to the King—Henri IV. pretends to be satisfied and permits him to return to the Château of Marcoussis—But sends the Provost Defunctis thither to arrest the count and seize his papers—Stratagem by which Defunctis contrives to surprise the château—The papers found at Marcoussis reveal the existence of a most formidable conspiracy—And establish beyond all doubt the guilt of Madame de Verneuil, as well as of her relatives—Entragues, in the hope of saving his head, reveals to the King the whereabouts of the promise of marriage given to his daughter—Henri IV., exasperated against Madame de Verneuil by her persistent assumption of innocence, determines to replace her by a new mistress—The comedy of Mlle. Jacqueline de Beuil—A nominal husband—Manœuvres of the Comte d'Auvergne to avoid arrest—He is captured and thrown into the Bastille.

AT the beginning of June 1604, the alarming discovery was made that one of the secretaries of Villeroy, Minister for Foreign Affairs, named L'Hoste, whose duty it was to decipher despatches, had for some little time past been in the habit of delivering copies of all documents of any importance which passed through his hands to the Spanish Ambassador. When on the point of being arrested, he took to flight; but, closely pursued by the Grand Provost and his archers, he was drowned while attempting to cross the Marne, near La Faye.

The Comte d'Auvergne, who was the soul and leader of the conspiracy of which L'Hoste had been but a subordinate agent, became greatly alarmed, and, with the object of diverting the suspicions of the King and giving him something else to think about, he demanded an audience on a private matter of great importance, and so soon as he entered the royal presence, said boldly :

"The marchioness is deceiving your Majesty with the Duc de Bellegarde ! "

Taking into consideration the fact that it was largely owing to his sister's intercession that M. d'Auvergne had been treated with such extraordinary leniency for his share in the Biron affair, his behaviour on this occasion was certainly sadly lacking in gratitude. But then that admirable quality found no place in the character of one who "concealed beneath the exterior of a prince the soul of a blackleg."[1]

"From whom did you learn this malicious gossip ? " inquired the King, affecting to make light of the matter.

The Count replied that M. de Sigogne was his informant. Henri IV. then demanded what proofs the other had, and was told that Bellegarde had been seen entering Henriette's hôtel after midnight. Puzzled and annoyed, he ordered Auvergne not to leave Paris, and dismissed him.

The next day he sent for all three : the count, Sigogne and Madame de Verneuil, and confronted them with one another. Then, turning to Auvergne, he requested him to repeat what he had told him the previous day.

Impudently the other persisted in maintaining that Bellegarde was his sister's favoured lover, and that he had it from Sigogne.

"If I were a man," cried Henriette furiously, "I would make you swallow your words with my dagger ! "

"And you," said the King, addressing Sigogne, "what answer have you to make ? "

"The count has lied ! " replied Sigogne bluntly.

Without asking any further questions or making any comment, Henri IV. dismissed them, and they took their departure, the two gentlemen glaring defiance at one another. So soon as they were outside the sacred precincts of the Louvre, Auvergne challenged his adversary to mortal combat, an invitation which was, of course, accepted ; but the King intervened and forbade them to meet. Thereupon the count, pretending to be deeply offended at his Majesty's refusal, left the Court and retired to Auvergne, only too glad to escape, for a time at any rate, from the fast-gathering storm.

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[1] Henri Martin, "Histoire de France, jusqu'en 1789."

The very day after his departure, the English Ambassador handed the King a letter from James I., which advised him to seize the person and papers of one Thomas Morgan, a secret agent of Spain, then in Paris. He followed this counsel, and Morgan was promptly arrested, together with an assistant of his named Fortan, whom he had placed with Madame de Verneuil, ostensibly to teach the lady Spanish, but really to keep her informed of the progress of the conspiracy. Partly enlightened by the compromising letters found at Morgan's house, on June 22, Henri IV. wrote to Sully, who was in the Limousin :

"My friend, I have written you this line, while waiting until in two days' time I shall send you d'Escures, from whom you will learn that we have discovered many treasons, in which the Comte d'Auvergne and M. d'Entragues are implicated, and things so extraordinary that you will hardly believe them. We have also ascertained, from letters which M. de Bouillon has written, which we have intercepted, that he is still making mischief and that M. de la Trémouille is taking a hand in the game."

But, being unable to make up his mind that his mistress was also guilty, he added :

"Nevertheless, it seems that the marchioness has not been aware of the real objects of the underhand dealings by which the others propose to profit either now or in the future."

Two days after the arrest of Morgan, Henri IV. went to Verneuil, to which, after the unpleasant scene in the King's cabinet at the Louvre, Henriette had again deemed it prudent to retire for a while.

"Letters from your father have been found on Morgan," said he brusquely the moment the door had closed behind the lackey who had announced him; "tell me what you know about them."

The marchioness, far too astute to show any uneasiness, answered carelessly:

"They are, without doubt, letters recommending him to my uncle, the Duke of Lennox."

The King made a gesture of impatience.

"No," said he, "there is no question of recommendations; your name is mixed up in these letters."

"Then show them to me," remarked the lady coolly; "if my memory revives, I will tell you all the truth."

The King then informed her that he had written to Entragues bidding him come to Saint-Germain, where the Court was now in residence, and requested her to write herself to her father and advise him to obey.

This Henriette promised to do, and he took his departure. Entragues wrote to the King that he would come to the Court, while Madame de Verneuil, on her side, returned to Paris and requested Henri IV.'s permission to see her father. He consented, but on condition that he should speak to the count first.

The King did not invite any of his counsellors to be present at this interview, at the conclusion of which he went to visit Madame de Verneuil.

"It is quite certain," said he, "that your father has been engaged in intrigues with Morgan."

And he begged her, as he had at Verneuil, to reveal all she knew about them, promising that, in that case, he would deal leniently with the count.

But Henriette persisted in denying all knowledge of the matter.

"Well," said the King, "I will see your father again. If he makes a full confession, I will show him clemency."

This second interview took place at the Tuileries, and Henri IV., having contrived to extract from Entragues some partial admissions, returned to the marchioness.

"You have certainly deceived me," said he. "Your father has been treating on your behalf with Spain. It is incredible that you should be unaware of it."

"I knew nothing about it," was the reply, given with unruffled composure.

The King drew from his pocket a letter which Entragues had written to Morgan and inquired if she recognized the writing.

She answered that it was her father's, but that she was in ignorance of what the letter contained.

"No matter," said the King, beginning to relent somewhat and thinking that perhaps after all she knew nothing about the paternal manœuvres. "I have consented to your father coming to dine with you to-day, for you know how much I love you. Let him tell you everything, and, I repeat, I will show indulgence."

"I will kneel to him, Sire, to entreat him to reveal everything," exclaimed the marchioness fervently.[1]

Entragues dined with his daughter, and long and anxiously did they deliberate as to the course which it would be advisable for them to pursue in the extremely unpleasant situation in which they were placed. Finally, it was decided that Entragues should confess to nothing more than what they believed the King already knew, and which did not amount to anything very criminal, and that, in regard to this, he should pose as the martyr of his affection for his daughter.

He accordingly prepared a long memoir in which he set forth all the troubles and difficulties in which Henri IV.'s liaison with his daughter had involved him, and declared that he had entered into relations with Spain for no other purpose than to secure for Henriette

[1] La Ferrière.

an asylum from the vengeance of the Queen, in the event of the King's death. And he took great credit to himself for having refused the large sum of money which the Spanish Ambassador, Taxis,[1] with whom Morgan had placed him in communication, had offered him for the promise of marriage which the King had given his daughter.[2]

This memoir, or, more probably, a summary of its contents, since it is of considerable length, he read to Henri IV. at their third interview, which took place the following day at Saint-Germain. His Majesty listened attentively, and, appearing to be satisfied with this pretended explanation, gave Entragues permission to return to the Château of Marcoussis, from which he had come. But these partial admissions, joined to those of Morgan and the papers found on that personage, clearly indicated the existence of a dangerous conspiracy, of which more certain proofs would without doubt be found at Marcoussis, where perchance the promise of marriage might be discovered at the same time. Therefore, no sooner had Entragues taken his departure than the King sent for the Provost, Defunctis, and charged him to proceed thither, arrest his pseudo-father-in-law and take care to seize all his papers, adding that he could have " ten cannon and five regiments " to assist him if he required them.

The Provost smilingly replied that, as his Majesty's principal object appeared to be to get possession of M. d'Entragues's papers, it would be most imprudent to employ force, since, at the first alarm, the old gentleman would assuredly hasten to destroy the compromising documents. It would therefore be necessary to have recourse to stratagem. However, if the King would leave the matter entirely in his hands, he would no doubt be able to find a way out of the difficulty. To this the King agreed, stipulating only that M. d'Entragues should be under lock and key and the papers in his hands within a fortnight, and that Defunctis should keep the matter a profound secret.

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[1] Taxis had been recently replaced as Ambassador by Don Balthazar de Zuniga.

[2] " 'If the promise of marriage is such as I have been assured,' said Taxis to me, 'deliver it to me; I will give you 200,000 écus!' 'It is in a safe place,' I replied, 'and I shall not give it up.' 'Ah well! no matter, in the event of the King's death, my master offers you a refuge for your daughter.' 'The King is fifty-three,' I replied. 'I am sixty-three. He of us who will survive will watch over my daughter.' "

Defunctis lost no time in sending to the village of Marcoussis one of his most trusted subordinates, who, under the pretext that he had come to the country to recruit his health after an illness, installed himself there and closely reconnoitred the neighbouring château. He recognized that, with its three deep moats and drawbridges always raised, it would be a difficult place to take by surprise, but he ascertained that on fast days it was customary to lower the bridges for a few minutes in order to allow the peasant-women who brought butter and eggs for sale to approach the gate. He duly reported what he had learned to the Provost, who, on the following Friday, disguised four of his archers as country-women and sent them, with baskets on their arms and pistols hidden therein, to the château, while he himself, with forty others, lay in ambush in an adjoining wood.

On perceiving the supposed women, Entragues's chef caused the drawbridges to be lowered to allow them to cross the moats, and came to the gate to bargain with them. But, to his astonishment, instead of producing butter and eggs from the baskets they carried, they drew forth pistols and, holding them to his head, bound and gagged him.

Masters of the gate, they then gave the signal agreed upon, and Defunctis and his men made their way into the château and quietly took possession of it—so quietly, indeed, that Entragues, who had not yet risen, heard nothing, and was still slumbering peacefully when the Provost, guided by a valet-de-chambre, entered his bedchamber. Instead of disturbing him, Defunctis, who appears to have had a sense of humour, waited patiently until the count awoke and, hearing someone in the room, demanded: "Who is there?" Then he stepped up to the bed, drew aside the curtains and stood there enjoying the other's stupefaction.

Quickly recovering his composure, however, Entragues, who judged all men by his own low standard of honour, made an impudent attempt to bribe Defunctis, offering him a casket containing jewels worth, according to his own account, 50,000 écus, if he would allow him access to a cupboard built into the wall opposite his bed. All he wanted to take from it, he declared, was a lease which he was bound to complete within three days, in default of which he would lose a very large sum of money. The Provost, however, declined the offer, and, having affixed the seals to all the doors and placed guards at the château, he carried off M. d'Entragues to Paris, where he was shut up in the Conciergerie.[1]

Two or three days later, Defunctis, by the King's orders, returned to Marcoussis, and, in the presence of Entragues's secretary, Gautier, whom the count had nominated to assist at the examination of his papers, opened the cupboard in the wall. It contained a great number of documents, and amongst them five of supreme importance, which established the guilt of all the chief suspects beyond any possible doubt. They were: the cipher of the King of Spain; a letter in French addressed to Entragues and signed, "Yo el Rey"; two others to Madame de Verneuil and the Comte d'Auvergne, and, finally, a letter, likewise signed by Philip III., which contained that monarch's promise that if the person of Henriette's son, the little Duc de Verneuil, were delivered to him, he would recognize him as Dauphin, true and legitimate successor to the Crown of France. Entragues and Auvergne were to be put in possession of two fortresses as places of surety and each to receive a pension of 20,000 ducats, and the Catholic King promised them, besides, "aid and assistance at need." As for the "Dauphin," he was to have five fortresses in Portugal, an important government and a pension of 50,000 ducats.

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[1] Du Vair, "Anecdotes sur l'histoire de France"; Le Laboureur, "Additions aux Mémoires de Castelnau," Vol. II.

The documents, having been initialled by Gautier, were brought by the Provost to Henri IV., who, we are assured by Du Vair, "jumped for joy" on seeing the King of Spain's cipher, and was so transported with delight when he cast his eyes over the engagement into which his enemy had entered, that he embraced Defunctis again and again, "declaring that he had rendered him that day the greatest service which it was possible to render the State." It is probable that his satisfaction was materially increased by the knowledge that he had now at last got the whip-hand over Henriette, whose refusal of her favours perhaps occasioned him more indignation than her intrigues with Spain, about which, in point of fact, he had long had his suspicions.

The King was, no doubt, not a little disappointed that the promise of marriage was not amongst the papers which had been discovered at Marcoussis, but he had not long to wait for the recovery of that celebrated document. For Entragues, aware that he was in evil case and that the correspondence now in Henri IV.'s possession rendered him liable to lose his head, sent for Defunctis and told him that "the King had been very desirous of having a certain paper, which he had always refused to give him; but, if he were assured that his life would be spared, he would reveal the place where it was concealed." The King, when informed of the count's offer, declined to give him any such assurance; nevertheless, the latter decided that it was advisable not to lose such an opportunity of placating the sovereign against whom he had been conspiring, and discharged his part of the bargain which he had proposed. Thereupon Henri IV. sent Loménie, the Keeper of the Seals, to Marcoussis, where the paper which had been the cause of so much trouble was found, as Entragues had indicated, in a little glass bottle, enclosed within a larger bottle covered with cotton-wool, which had been hidden in a hole made in a wall.

"We recovered yesterday, from the hands of the Sieur d'Entragues," writes Villeroy to Beaumont, the French Ambassador in England, "that fine pretended promise concerning which there has been so much talk, and that in the form which the King's servants and counsellors judged necessary to obviate all present and future inconveniences." [1]

As a matter of fact, it had been thought advisable to make Entragues sign a declaration that this was the authentic promise and that no other to the same effect existed.[2]

"The 2 July, 1604," runs this document, which, it will be observed, does not adhere too strictly to the facts of the case, "his Majesty being in the town of Paris, at the residence of the Sieur Zamet, Messire François de Balzac, Sieur d'Entragues, chevalier of his orders and captain of fifty men-at-arms, presented himself, who told and represented to him that having formerly entreated him to give him some writing which might serve to exempt him from blame in the eyes of those who might wish to calumniate what was passing between his Majesty and the Marquise de Verneuil, his daughter, and having received the same, he had always preserved it carefully up to the present, when he had deemed it to be his duty to give it back, by reason of some *false reports* which were being circulated in regard to this matter, to the effect that he proposed to make a wrong use of it, although he had never entertained any such idea and knew that the said writing could be of no service save to him alone, for his satisfaction and for the purpose aforesaid. And he very humbly besought his Majesty to receive it in the presence of the princes and lords whom he saw about him, that they might be witnesses of his sincerity and of the declaration which he makes of never having had any writing from his Majesty save that one; that he retained it for himself, and never gave any extract or copy to another; and that if any evil report to that effect had been made to him, that he would be pleased to attach no faith to it. To which his Majesty said that he well remembered that the Sieur d'Entragues had not demanded the said writing of him save for the aforesaid consideration; that *he had not since either thought or considered that he had any cause to be uneasy about it;* but since such false reports were being circulated, as though this writing was of a different tenor and substance from what it is, in prejudice even of the honour and fidelity which the Sieur d'Entragues owes him, his Majesty has approved this duty which he has undertaken of restoring it, and wishes that it should be inserted word for word in the present deed, in order to remove every pretext in the future from any one who might entertain the evil intention of altering it or altering something in the truth and substance of it."

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[1] Cited by La Ferrière.

[2] There had been a popular rumour of one written by the King with his blood, which Henriette was said to keep in her own possession.

Then followed the text of the unfortunate promise which we have given in an earlier chapter, to which was added:

"We, the undersigned, François de Balzac, Sieur d'Entragues, acknowledge and certify that the above writing is the true and only writing executed by the King at our supplication and instance, at the time and place mentioned therein, and since placed in our hands, which we have now restored to his Majesty, in the presence of the Comte de Soissons and the Duc de Montpensier, the Chancellor, the Sieurs de Sillery, de la Guesle, procurator-general, and Jeannin, counsellor of State. Executed at Paris, the second day of July, 1604.—Signed: DE BALSAC."

The deed was then signed by the persons present:

"We, the undersigned counsellors and secretaries of State, certify the said Sieur d'Entragues to have written and signed with his own hand the acknowledgment and attestation written above. Executed in the place, day and year aforesaid, in the presence of the princes and sieurs named above, who, in witness of this, have signed the present deed: CHARLES DE BOURBON, HENRI DE BOURBON, BELLIÈVRE, N. BRULART, DE LA GUESLE, P. JEANNIN, DE NEUFVILLE, POTIER."[1]

Henri IV., having at length got possession of the document which, notwithstanding the tone of almost contemptuous indifference which characterizes the declaration we have just cited, might have proved a dangerous weapon in the hands of his enemies, began to relent towards Madame de Verneuil. Indeed, had that lady only consented to confess everything, instead of continuing to pose as an injured innocent and actually having the effrontery to demand that the King should assure her an income of 100,000 livres—" Very little in view of the promises which had been made her "—to enable her to live in peace in some quiet corner of France or to withdraw to some foreign country, it is quite probable that he would have endeavoured to hush the whole matter up, at least so far as she was concerned.

Towards the end of July, Villeroy said to the Venetian Ambassador:

" You have spoken to the King as an honest man; you have urged him to break with the marchioness; but the empire of this woman is such that, while demanding of us what he ought to do, we see plainly that he desires and expects from us counsels of clemency."

Villeroy was not far wrong, for shortly afterwards we find the King writing to Henriette:

" I promise you that you shall see your father, whose guards I have caused to be taken away; but do not remain there more than one day; for his contagion is dangerous. I approve of your going to Saint-Germain to see your children. Love me, my *menon* [*sic*]; for I swear to thee that all the rest of the world is nothing to me in comparison with thee."[1]

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[1] Bibliothèque Nationale, MSS. Français 4120, cited by M. Charles Merki.

On August 27, the marchioness went to Saint-Germain and saw her children, whom Henri IV. had recently obliged her to surrender to him. Afterwards, she asked Madame de Montglat, the Dauphin's *gouvernante*, to allow her to see him, a request which was granted. But when she would have taken his hand to kiss it, the child, whose capriciousness and selfishness were already very noticeable, snatched it away, exclaiming: "*Allez-vous-en!*" And it is related that, some days later, finding the little Duc de Verneuil in the King's wardrobe, he slapped his face.

Before returning to Verneuil, Henriette spent some days in Paris, evidently in the hope that the King would pay her a visit. But he did not come. The fact was that the lady's manœuvres, and her persistent assumption of innocence in the face of the evidence against her, had begun to wear out the patience of even this most long-suffering of lovers, and if he were not yet able to break entirely with her, he was resolved to make a great effort to do so. "He is doing everything that is possible," writes the Tuscan Ambassador, Giovannini, to his Court, "to snatch from his heart this fatal passion."

With his temperament and habits, there was but one possible remedy: to drive out fire by fire, to replace the old mistress by a new one.

The choice of Henriette's successor was not an easy one. The Court, it was true, swarmed with light beauties who asked nothing better than to occupy the exalted position which Madame de Verneuil had filled with so much distinction and so much profit to herself. But most of them were ladies of considerable experience in this *métier*, and the Béarnais preferred green fruit. Finally, however, he decided in favour of Mlle. Jacqueline de Beuil,[1] a penniless orphan, who, on the death of her parents, had been sheltered by Charlotte de la Trémouille, Princesse de Condé.

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[1] "Lettres-Missives," Vol. VI. There appears to be considerable doubt as to the date when this letter was written. The editors of Henri IV.'s correspondence place it towards the end of 1604, while Mr. P. F. Willert ascribes it to the first weeks of the following year. The Comte de la Ferrière and M. Charles Merki, however, seem to have no doubt that it was written in the summer of 1604.

Mlle. de Beuil is described as a delicious blonde, with a complexion of dazzling clearness, magnificent eyes sparkling with animation and lips which seemed to invite kisses—altogether a most alluring damsel.[2] But when the King informed the Princesse de Condé that her young *protégée* had been so fortunate as to find favour in his sight, that lady, to his intense indignation, refused to lend herself to his desires and even talked about sending the girl back to her relatives. Rightly or wrongly, Henri IV. attributed this unexpected resistance to the influence of a certain M. de Belin, who was the governor of the young Prince de Condé and, so scandal averred, the lover of the princess-dowager. He therefore sent for him and questioned him in the presence of the Constable.

" On the terms on which you are with the princess," said he, with biting sarcasm, " it becomes you well to play the Puritan with me ! "

And he rated him in such fashion that the poor man is said to have left the royal presence more dead than alive.

After this, the Princesse de Condé judged that further resistance would be worse than useless, and accordingly resolved to make the best bargain possible for her *protégée*, who, on her side, appears to have been only too pleased at the idea of stepping into Madame de Ver-

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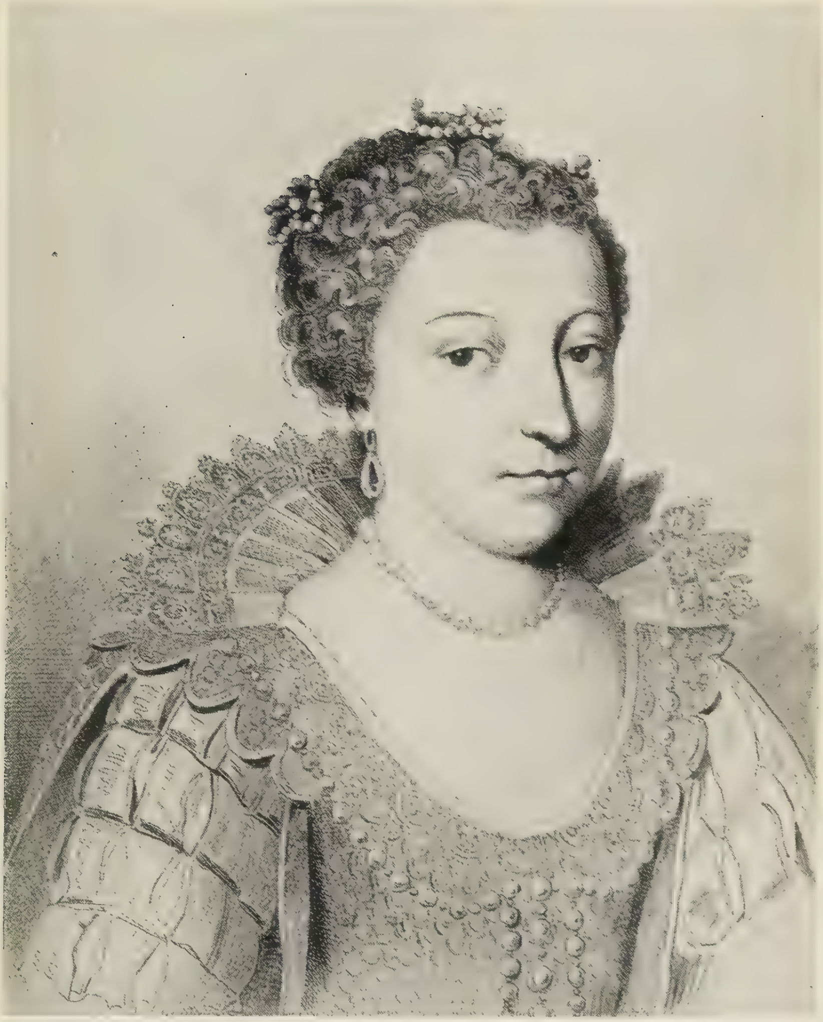
[1] The author of the "Supplément au Journal de L'Estoile," says that she was a daughter of Claude de Beuil, Sieur de Courcillon and de Marocure, who died in 1596.

[2] " We have of her," writes the Comte de la Ferrière, " only a crayon by Dumonstiers, dated 1623. Embonpoint has come, and the chin is slightly puffy ; but the eyes have not lost their splendour. The corsage, partly open, allows us to perceive the beautifully modelled shoulders and bosom."



Jacqueline de Beuil, Comtesse de Moret.

[*To face p.* 154.

neuil's shoes. Brought to Court, in response to a peremptory order from the King, Mlle. de Beuil, shrewdly counselled by the princess, proceeded to formulate the terms upon which she would be prepared to surrender. To begin with, by way of earnest-money, she demanded 50,000 écus, though she eventually consented to accept 30,000, which was less than a third of the sum which Henriette had cost. Then, following the example of her predecessor, she wanted an estate, a title and a pension of 500 écus a month, to all of which demands the King consented without demur. Finally, becoming more and more exacting, she desired that she should first be provided with a husband. To this demand the King likewise acceded, and the Queen, only too happy to be rid at any price of the redoubtable Henriette, pretended ignorance of an affair which was already the talk of the whole Court.

Nothing now remained but to find the man who would be willing to play the part of the husband, and in an age when ideas of honour were so very elastic and so many of the noblesse had been reduced practically to beggary by the civil wars, this presented no difficulty. Indeed, it is said that the gentleman chosen did not wait to be approached, but came forward to offer himself. He was a man of good family, a nephew of Chanvallon, the former lover of Queen Margot, one Harlay de Césy by name, good-looking and not without accomplishments, being an excellent performer on the lute, but so miserably poor that he was willing to be content with a pension of no more than 1,200 écus as the price of the service required of him.

The marriage was celebrated at Saint-Maur-les-Fossés on October 5, 1604, at six o'clock in the morning, and the bridal pair were brought back to Paris, to the Hôtel d'Hercule, at the corner of the Rue des Grands-Augustins. The husband was permitted to spend the first night with the bride, but the nuptial chamber was lighted up as though for a fête, and gentlemen appointed by the King kept watch beside the bed to see that he did not infringe the ancient *droit du seigneur*, which his Majesty intended to exercise. On the following day, M. de Césy was banished to a room on the floor above, and the King took his place.[1]

At the end of 1604, Henri IV., in accordance with his promise, created his new mistress Comtesse de Moret, but the following year this strange marriage was annulled by the Pope. M. de Césy, as the reward of his complaisance, kept the 30,000 écus, and in 1616 married Marie de Béthune, who is said to have been the ugliest young woman at the Court. However, she was probably well dowered and came of an influential family, and Césy prospered so well that eventually he became Ambassador at Constantinople.

All this time, strange as it may seem, the Comte d'Auvergne, who had undoubtedly been the soul of the conspiracy, was still at large. Shortly after the arrest of Morgan, Henri IV. had sent his confidant d'Escures to Clermont, to which the count had retired, with a letter in his own hand ordering him to return immediately to Paris, and another from the Comtesse d'Auvergne, in which she urged her husband to obey the King's command. The count read the letters, which did not mention the reason why his Majesty was so anxious to see him, and then asked d'Escures for news of the Court. D'Escures, eyeing the other narrowly the while, told him what had just happened, adding that several great nobles were compromised by the admissions which Morgan had made when under examination. Auvergne went very white and said nothing, and his visitor, certain of his guilt, continued:

" Monsieur, if you have had relations with Morgan, I shall counsel you to lose no time in truthfully acquainting the King with everything which has occurred and revealing to him those who are implicated in this affair, in order to obtain your pardon, since I feel sure that you will meet with clemency at his hands. For, if the Maréchal de Biron had been willing to believe the same counsel which I gave him in Burgundy, he would have obtained it."

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[1] L'Estoile. The chronicler adds details which are a little too *gai* for us to reproduce here.

Auvergne appeared inclined to follow this advice, and, believing that Morgan had revealed all he knew, and that Henriette had also confessed, sent to Henri IV. a partial confession of his share in the plot and denounced certain of his accomplices, including his sister, who, he did not doubt, would be able to extricate herself from any situation however difficult it might seem. But he obstinately refused to come to the Court, unless the King would accord him *lettres d'abolition* for all his offences.

To this Henri IV. consented, and d'Escures was despatched to Clermont with the letters. The King wished to get to the bottom of the affair, which he was never likely to do unless the chief conspirator were prepared to make a full confession ; and he was anxious, for Henriette's sake, to avoid the necessity of having her brother arrested. For that would entail having him brought to trial for high treason and almost certainly condemned to death. It would, of course, be in his Majesty's power to commute the capital penalty, but, in view of the count's past misdeeds, only to long years of captivity.

The letters were duly delivered to the count, but the latter still refused to present himself, except on condition that his pardon should first be registered by the Parlement.

"The great desire that the King shows for me to come," said he, "makes me distrustful. Biron died because he did not listen to the advice of those who entreated him to remain in Burgundy. I am on bad terms with his Majesty, on bad terms with the Queen, on bad terms with my sister ; I will not go to the Court, unless my *abolition* is registered by the Parlement."

Murat, an official of the Treasury who, at Sully's suggestion, had been sent with d'Escures, thereupon inquired if he had been conspiring against the life of the

King and the Dauphin, in which case, of course, no *abolition* would hold good.

Auvergne declared, with great oaths, that such a crime had never been contemplated by him. "But my sister is so cunning!" he added. "She will invent something of the kind in order to ruin me and make her peace with the King at my expense."

And the envoys were obliged to return to the King and report the failure of their mission.

At length, towards the end of October, Henri IV., losing all patience, determined that, come what might, the Comte d'Auvergne must be arrested.[1] To effect this, however, was far from easy, since the count, foreseeing such a decision, had left Clermont and retired to the village of Vic, and was taking the most elaborate precautions to guard against surprise, causing the roads leading to it to be patrolled by trusty retainers and posting others, provided with hunting-horns, on the neighbouring heights, to give warning of the approach of any troops. He had a mistress in the environs of Clermont, a certain Madame de Chasseguai, a fantastic Amazon who had been in the habit of accompanying him on his hunting expeditions, but, from fear of being arrested, he ceased to visit her house, and the two lovers used to meet by night in remote villages, but never twice in the same place. However, eventually, he allowed himself to be taken by what seems a very simple stratagem.

Two companies of light horse, of one of which the little Duc de Verneuil was the nominal commander, happened to be temporarily stationed in Auvergne, and the officers invited the count, who held the important appointment of Colonel-General of the Light Cavalry, to review them and report to the King on their efficiency. No request could have been more natural, particularly as the two companies had been sent to Auvergne at his own desire, and the fact that it was proposed to hold the review on a wide plain between Noisants and Clermont served to remove any suspicion which he might otherwise have entertained. He therefore accepted the invitation and proceeded to the rendezvous, accompanied by two servants and mounted on a "powerful Scottish hunter," on which, in the unlikely event of any danger threatening him, he might easily effect his escape.

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[1] According to Lescure ("Les Amours d'Henri IV."), it had been discovered that new intrigues were being carried on, originated by the Spanish Ambassador, Don Balthazar de Zuniga.

On his arrival, the two commanding officers, d'Eurre and Nerestang, came to meet him, hat in hand, accompanied by four soldiers, disguised as lackeys. They conversed for a few minutes, and then proceeded to the saluting-point, d'Eurre riding on one side of the count and Nerestang on the other. Suddenly, at a given signal, two of the supposed lackeys seized the bridle of Auvergne's horse, the other two his legs, while the officers, closing in upon him, prevented him from drawing sword or pistol. The two servants whom he had brought with him tried to come to their master's assistance, but an arquebus shot or two fired from the ranks of the light cavalry over their heads made them think better of it; and the count was dragged from his horse, placed on that of a trooper and conducted to Aigueperse.

Auvergne took his arrest very coolly, his chief concern appearing to be that it would prevent him from keeping a rendezvous which Madame de Chasseguai had given him for that evening. He requested permission to write to the lady to express his regret for this involuntary discourtesy, which his captors gallantly accorded him.

From Aigueperse he was taken to Briare, where d'Escures was awaiting him with a coach, in which he was conveyed to Montargis. Here he was placed in a barge, which, descending the Loing and the Seine, brought him to Paris. On his arrival in the capital, he was conducted straight to the Bastille, and placed in the room which Biron had occupied.

A few days later the King said to the Venetian

Ambassador, to whom he was giving audience at the Louvre:

"I have put the Comte d'Auvergne in a place where he will be unable to do any more harm."

And he added in a tone of regret:

"The marchioness has allowed herself to embark in a very bad venture."[1]

At the first news of her brother's arrest, Henriette had hastened to Paris, but Henri IV. refused to see her and sent orders to her to return to Verneuil. During her absence, police officers visited the château with a search warrant, ransacked the marchioness's coffers and carried off some letters from her father relative to the negotiations with Spain which he was conducting on her behalf, and a number of *billets-doux*, of which several were in Sigogne's handwriting, a circumstance which brought about the disgrace of that gentleman.

"With the tender words which he addressed to her," writes the Comte de la Ferrière, "he mingled counsels in regard to the manner in which she was to conduct herself towards the King, her protector. Passive instrument, skilful adviser, had Sigogne been secretly paid for services rendered, or rather, sprightly story-teller, composer of little licentious verses, had he aided the marchioness to support the ennuis of her royal slavery? With such a woman, all suppositions are possible. Henri IV. fixed upon that which wounded the most his pride; seeing himself betrayed, deceived by the man of whom he believed himself the most sure and his usual intermediary with his mistress, he ordered him to return to his government of Dieppe and not to leave it again.

Sigogne, a resourceful personage, was skilful enough to find a rather plausible excuse in the delicate duties with which the King had entrusted him.

"Sire," he wrote, "my intention was innocent, and at the moment in which my hand was writing what has displeased your Majesty, my heart was thinking of serving you. The humour of her with whom I had to deal explains my actions. She desired extraordinary respect, a mind which surrendered to her wishes, and the appearance of much attachment to her interests. Seeing that an inclination so strong and combated by so many agitations constrained you to love her, I thought that all kinds of inventions were permitted me in order to serve you in your commands, and often when pretending that your Majesty was wrong and that reason was on the side of her who was deprived of it, her obstinacy was conquered and changed to your satisfaction."

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[1] Bibliothèque Nationale, "Dépêches des Ambassadeurs Vénitiens."

And he concluded by begging the King to curtail the period of his banishment from the Court, where he was accustomed to spend a good deal more time than at Dieppe.[1] However, his excuses do not appear to have had much effect upon Henri IV.

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[1] La Ferrière.

CHAPTER X

Henri IV. appears determined to allow justice to take its course—His answer to the appeal of the Comtesse d'Auvergne—The Parlement decrees that Madame de Verneuil shall be imprisoned—But the King modifies this order to confinement to her own house in Paris, and sends Sillery to make a last effort to persuade her to confess—Her haughty reply—The Comte d'Auvergne is examined by special commissioners appointed by the Parlement—His accusations against his sister—Examination of Morgan—And of the Comte d'Entragues—Madame de Verneuil appears before the commissioners—She persists in denying all knowledge of the conspiracy—Her second examination—Her prevarications in regard to a portrait of the Maréchal de Biron found at Verneuil—Confrontation of Entragues and Auvergne—And of the latter and Henriette.

THE arrest of the Comte d'Auvergne, following upon that of his step-father, created a great sensation, and a number of important personages who were related to them hastened to intervene in their favour with the King. But Henri IV. appeared this time determined to allow justice to take its course, and to put an end to these continual intrigues in which Spain was always mixed up. When the Comtesse d'Auvergne, a devoted wife who certainly deserved a better fate than to be united to this contemptible traitor, threw herself at his feet, all bathed in tears, to demand the pardon of her husband, he raised her up courteously, but spoke to her very firmly.

"Madame," said he, taking the Queen by the arm, "I have pitied your grief and your tears; but were I to grant you what you ask of me, it will be necessary for my wife to be declared a wanton, my son a bastard, and the realm a prey to faction!"

Madame de Verneuil remained to be dealt with, and, after long hesitation, for he still loved her, perhaps, indeed, more than he had ever done, as is the way of such men, he decided that she should be proceeded against. There can, we think, be very little doubt that his principal motive was the hope that the fear of punishment would suffice to bend the haughty head of this woman who had artfully opposed to his amorous desires the fear of God and the orders of her confessor, and who now angrily repulsed his offers of forgiveness, if she would only cease to persist in her denials and admit the part she had played in the plot.

But from one hour to another, the monarch passed from severity to weakness, and when the Parlement directed that Henriette should be imprisoned, he modified this order to confinement to her own hôtel in the Faubourg Saint-Germain, under the observation of the Captain of the Night Watch. And, a day or two later, he sent Sillery to her to make a last effort to bring her to reason.

But Henriette, far from being alarmed at the situation in which she found herself, had preserved her sang-froid, her effrontery and her spitefulness. She was not afraid to die, said she ; on the contrary, she desired it. The King might cause her to be put to death, but, if he did, all the world would say that it was *his wife* whom he had sent to the scaffold. For she was the true Queen ; the other—the Italian woman—the intruder ! And when Sillery asked her what answer he was to take back to the King, she answered haughtily :

" I demand only three things of his Majesty : Justice for myself, pardon for my father, the rope for my brother ! "

On November 24, 1604, three special commissioners appointed by the Parlement : the First President, Achille de Harlay, and the Counsellors Étienne de Fleury and Philibert de Turin, proceeded to the Bastille to examine the Comte d'Auvergne. This was the second occasion on which they had visited the count, as on the first he had contented himself by placing before them the *lettres d'abolition* which he had extracted from Henri IV. in the previous summer, and informing them that he should refuse to answer any questions.[1] The Parlement had therefore sent the Advocate-General to the King to represent to him that, as this was the third occasion on which the Comte d'Auvergne had been charged with high treason, he had rendered himself unworthy of pardon; and, with the consent of his Majesty, it had passed a decree ordering the accused to submit to examination on pain of being adjudged guilty of the crime imputed to him.

Auvergne having intimated that he was now prepared to answer the questions which might be addressed to him, the First President asked:

"How many times have you seen Taxis, the Ambassador of Spain?"

"Twice; the first occasion was at the house of a woman whose name is unknown to me, behind the Petit Saint-Antoine. Entragues and I having explained to Taxis the dangers which threatened my sister from the hatred of the Queen, inquired whether, in the event of the death of the King, who was then very ill, an asylum would be accorded us in Spain. Taxis promised it us in his master's name."

"Have you seen Morgan at the marchioness's house?" was the next question.

"No, never! . . . But I assert that my sister was in ignorance of nothing of what was being negotiated on her behalf. The day on which Morgan was arrested, meeting her in the Queen's gardens, she said to me: 'The King knows everything through this man; but I do not fear anything, for I have my remission in my pocket.'"[2]

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[1] As a matter of fact, the letters had no legal force, as they had only been accorded on the understanding that Auvergne should come to the Court and make a full confession; and this he had not done.

[2] The latter part of this statement is obviously false. In the first place, it is certain that Auvergne left Paris *before* Morgan's arrest, and, in the second, after the scene in the King's cabinet at the Louvre in which he had accused her of a liaison with Bellegarde, he could hardly have been on speaking terms with his sister.

The examination was resumed on the 27th, when Auvergne maintained that he had on several occasions begged his sister to surrender to the King the promise of marriage which his Majesty had given her, and even invoked the evidence of Sully, to whom, he said, he had spoken about the matter. Finally, he accused the marchioness of having asked the King for the keys of the Sainte-Chapelle in order to give Taxis a rendezvous there. And he declared that had it not been for the ill fortune which had obliged him to leave Paris, he would have revealed all to the King.

On December 4, Morgan, who was imprisoned in the Conciergerie, was brought before the commissioners. His defence was feeble in the extreme. Questioned as to the motives of his relations with Taxis and Entragues, he replied that he had paid court to the Ambassador merely in the hope of inducing him to use his good offices to obtain for him from the Court of Madrid a sum of 6,000 crowns owing to him by the late Queen of Scotland, whose agent he had been ; that his only object in visiting Entragues was to obtain from him letters of recommendation to the latter's brother-in-law, the Duke of Lennox, who had great influence in England. Asked about a letter from Taxis which he was known to have transmitted to Entragues—another from Entragues found at Morgan's house referred to it, and mentioned that it had been burned by Madame de Verneuil—he answered that he was in entire ignorance of its contents. Before being taken back to the Conciergerie, he pleaded that he was a foreigner, exiled from his own country on account of his religion ; that if he had committed any fault, he had done so unwittingly, and that his long imprisonment had ruined his health. For which reasons he implored the clemency of the King.

This affair, in which such important persons were implicated, was naturally the chief topic of conversation both of Court and town.

" We do not speak now," writes Villeroy to Beaumont, the French Ambassador in England, on December 13,

" save of the trial of the Comtes d'Auvergne and d'Entragues and the Marquise de Verneuil. She and her father have not yet been examined, but I am of opinion that they will proceed to it soon."

The following day, in fact, Entragues was brought to the Palais de Justice and examined by the First President. He began by placing in the hands of the commissioners a copy of the memoir which he had presented to Henri IV. at Saint-Germain in the previous June, and posed, as he had in his interview with the King, as the martyr of his affection for his daughter. Asked by Harlay what was the real object of the conspiracy, he replied that his sole purpose was to secure an asylum for his daughter from the animosity of the Queen. He denied emphatically that Henriette was aware of his negotiations with the Spaniards, which was proved, he declared, by the fact that, fearing that the Queen had designs upon her life, she had repeatedly appealed to the King to give her some fortress to which she might retire. His Majesty had offered her the citadel of Caen, and, if she had declined it, it was because Henri IV. would not allow her to appoint a governor of her own choosing.

The First President asked him to explain why he had so persistently refused to surrender the promise of marriage which the King had given the marchioness.

" I had sworn to my daughter," he replied, " not to give it up except to herself. Nevertheless, by dint of solicitations, I was induced to restore it ; but when at Fontainebleau I offered the King to surrender it to him, '*That promise is worth nothing*,' said he to me ; '*do what you wish with it.*' "

In a second examination, he again asserted that Madame de Verneuil had known nothing of the conferences which he and the Comte d'Auvergne had had with Taxis, and when brought before the commissioners for the third and last time and shown a letter which had been seized at Morgan's house, and which appeared to prove that a copy of the promise of marriage had been sent to Spain, he still persisted in his denials.

The Comte d'Auvergne was next summoned before the court and examined by Sillery and Jeannin. In contrast to his step-father, he asserted, as he had when interrogated in the Bastille, that Madame de Verneuil knew all about the negotiations with Spain, his object being, without doubt, to throw on her the chief responsibility for the conspiracy, aware that the King's affection for her would prove an effectual safeguard. At the same time, he was in accord with Entragues as to the purpose of the negotiations, which, he said, had no other object than to assure his sister's personal safety. Asked if a treaty with Spain had been signed, he denied it and declared that, if such a document were shown to him, he would sign his death-warrant.

On December 17, Madame de Verneuil appeared and was examined by Harlay.

"Were you acquainted with Taxis, the Spanish Ambassador?" asked the First President, "and how many times have you seen him?"

"On one occasion only, the evening before his departure for Spain. The King had given me permission, and I conversed with him, besides, in the presence of several ladies."

"Have you received letters and presents from him? You yourself, have you written to him?"

"I have never written to him nor received letters from him. Two years ago, he offered me two pairs of gloves and a box of sweetmeats, and the King authorized me to accept them."

To the questions which were next put to her concerning the relations of her father and brother with the Spaniards, she answered that, if they had treated on her behalf, it was from the King's mouth alone that she had learned it. She had, however, since heard from other persons that her father, fearing for her life, in the event of the King's death, had asked Taxis to demand an asylum for her in the dominions of his master, the King of Spain.

"Who can have inspired you with such suspicions in respect to the Queen?" inquired Harlay.

"The King is not unaware who it is."

"It is not enough that the King knows. Tell us."

"Well, from different quarters I have been warned that the Queen, if the King were to fail me, would cause me to be imprisoned for the rest of my days."

"Who told you that?"

"I shall not name the persons, from fear of compromising them."

"Have negotiations been carried on with Spain on behalf of your children?"

"No, on my behalf alone."

"Did your father promise Taxis to surrender to him the promise of marriage which the King had made you?"

"I have never heard him say that he has spoken of this promise to Taxis."

The evidence which Henriette had given was then read over to her and she was asked to sign it, but, before doing so, she turned to the First President and said:

"Entreat his Majesty to do me the honour of seeing me."

This request having been refused, she continued:

"Pray then his Majesty to send M. de Sillery to me. I have seen him already a week ago. If I answered him that I knew that my father had demanded for me an asylum with the King of Spain, it was because I hoped that his Majesty would question me himself on the matter; but since this has not seemed good to him, I declare that I was in ignorance of it. I only said what I did in order to have the opportunity of speaking to the King."

On January 3, 1605, Madame de Verneuil again appeared before the commissioners and was examined by Harlay in regard to Auvergne's statement that she had asked Henri IV. for the keys of the Sainte-

Chapelle and given Taxis a rendezvous there. She denied having asked the King for the keys—his Majesty would bear her out and would probably remember who it was who had asked him for them. It was true that she had met Taxis there,[1] but the meeting was purely accidental, and, since there were more than a hundred persons present, it would have been impossible for her to confer secretly with him.

"Were you and the late Maréchal de Biron on friendly terms?" inquired Harlay, abruptly changing the subject.

"Never on intimate terms."

"Did the marshal give you his portrait?"

"No."

"Then whence comes this one, found in your coffers at Verneuil? Did you have it painted before or since the marshal's death?"

"A long time before the marshal's death, a painter named Jean Pol brought me several of them. I kept the one which seemed to me the best with the idea of buying it, but I have not yet paid for it."

"To preserve, Madame, the portrait of a rebel is to approve of his perfidy," remarked the First President severely. "Are you willing to abide by what the painter will say?"

"No," replied the marchioness dryly.

The artist was in due course summoned before the court and requested to give his version of the matter. He stated that he had sold to Madame de Verneuil a portrait of Biron, and that, subsequent to this purchase, the marchioness, having seen in his studio another portrait which had been commissioned by a friend of the marshal, had requested him to paint a replica of it for her. Shown the portrait seized at Verneuil, he recognized it as the last which he had painted. When questioned as to the date of this commission, he answered that he could not be positive, but he believed that it was a little time after Biron's death.

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[1] The lady had apparently forgotten that at her previous examination she had declared that she had only seen Taxis on one occasion, namely, on the evening before the Ambassador's return to Spain.

Although Henriette's purchase of this portrait was only a proof of sympathy, not of complicity, the incident, in conjunction with her prevarications, created a very unfavourable impression.

Unpleasant scenes took place when the accused were confronted with one another. On January 15, Entragues and the Comte d'Auvergne were brought face to face. The former, who was the first to be questioned, spoke of the affection which he had shown the other from his infancy, out of respect for the memory of King Charles IX., and which he had continued to show him up to the time when the count had assailed the honour of Madame de Verneuil.

Auvergne retorted that he had only spoken to the King because he knew that Sigogne was determined to reveal everything to his Majesty. This was the cause of the implacable hatred which the father and the daughter had conceived for him. And he affirmed anew, in the face of Entragues's denials, that Madame de Verneuil had been aware of all the negotiations which had been conducted on her behalf.

On the same day, the brother and sister faced one another.

"What objections, Madame, have you to oppose to the count?" inquired Harlay of the marchioness.

"I have only too many," answered Henriette, with a furious glance at Auvergne. "He has endeavoured to tarnish my honour, but I can appeal only to his conscience."

"Madame," rejoined the First President, "all your objections must be presented now. To-morrow they would no longer be admitted."

"Let it be so!" said she, and, in a low voice, continued:

"He has said that the Grand Equerry, the Duc de Bellegarde, was seen to enter my house after midnight; it is the King who has repeated it to me. Since that day, by his writings and by his words, it has been seen plainly that he desired to destroy my honour and my life."

"I regret infinitely," replied the count, with hypocritical audacity, "that Madame de Verneuil has interpreted my words in a sense so unfavourable. Sigogne had declared to me that he intended to reveal everything to the King, and without attaching too much faith to this calumny, it was so perfidious that I thought that it would be better for the King to be informed of it by myself. It was, then, in the marchioness's interest alone that I spoke, but she has taken it in bad part and I know that she has sworn my ruin. She has gone so far as to say that she would not regret my death, if my disgrace were to follow it, and, becoming more and more angry, has she not stated that she asked only one thing of God: pardon for her father, justice for herself, and a rope for me? As for her protestations that she knew nothing of the treaty with Spain, nothing is more false; it is she and her father who planned everything."

Asked by Harlay whether he had anything else to say, he declared that one day, when Madame de Verneuil was in the Queen's apartments, she had made use of such outrageous language in regard to his honour and his courage that the Comtesse d'Entragues, his mother, had been obliged to quit the room in order to hear no more.

"You have the right to reply, Madame," said the First President to Henriette, in the faint hope that she might have something to say relative to the main issue. But the lady preferred to confine herself to repulsing the fraternal aspersions upon her "honour."

"Sigogne declared to me at Verneuil," said she, "that it was not he who urged the Comte d'Auvergne to speak to the King; he has, then, accused me on his own initiative; and, at the time of the explanation which he had with Sigogne at Fontainebleau, he said to him: 'I am the most traitorous of men; but within three months I shall make you understand what has forced me to play this trick on you.' Even admitting that what he has said of me was true, as a brother he ought to have kept it secret. When I learned of his arrest, I rejoiced, I confess, to the bottom of my heart, for it was the only means of proving to the King the falsity of his accusations; but neither my father nor I have plotted against him. I defy anyone to produce witnesses who will prove the contrary. I have never made use in the Queen's apartments of the language attributed to me, and my mother has never been obliged to leave the room. . . ."

And much more to the same effect, the marchioness being apparently far more concerned to defend herself from the accusation of having received nocturnal visits from the fascinating Duc de Bellegarde than against the charge of conspiring with a foreign Power to subvert the State.

The accused were subsequently examined anew, this time separately, but they had nothing of any importance to add to all their contradictory declarations. It mattered, in fact, very little what they said, for the papers seized at Marcoussis would undoubtedly suffice to establish the charge of high treason, and Jeannin bluntly told the King that, if the decision rested with him, he would have all their heads cut off. However, at this juncture a new personage appeared upon the scene who was to extricate Henri IV. from the highly embarrassing situation in which he found himself.

CHAPTER XI

Arrival of the Duke of Lennox, brother-in-law of the Comte d'Entragues, in Paris as Ambassador Extraordinary—He intercedes with Henri IV. in favour of the accused—Annoyance of Villeroy, Minister for Foreign Affairs—His interview with the duke—Entragues, Auvergne and Morgan are found guilty of high treason and condemned to death—Madame de Verneuil ordered to be shut up in a convent until the Parlement should be "more fully informed" concerning her part in the conspiracy—But the King directs that the sentence shall not take effect immediately—Deplorable weakness of Henri IV., whose decision in regard to the condemned is subordinated entirely to his desire to resume his former relations with Madame de Verneuil—Henriette decides to sue for pardon—Her letter to the King—She is set at liberty—The sentence of death passed upon Entragues and Auvergne commuted to one of perpetual imprisonment—But, shortly afterwards, the former is released—Rebuff which Henri IV. sustains from the Duchesse de Nevers, with whom he has sought a new distraction—Madame de Verneuil is legally rehabilitated—Accident to the King and Queen at the ferry at Neuilly—Henriette comes to Paris and is received in secret by the King—Her *bon mot* at the Queen's expense—Exasperation of Marie de' Medici, who insists on the marchioness being sent back to Verneuil—Passionate letters of Henri IV. to her—But he refuses to dismiss her rival, the Comtesse de Moret, at her bidding—And takes a third sultana, in the person of Charlotte des Essarts, Mlle. de la Haye—Partial disgrace of this lady—Intrigue of Madame de Moret with the Prince de Joinville—Anger of the King—Joinville is again exiled.

SOME months before, the Duke of Lennox, brother-in-law of the Comte d'Entragues, had been nominated for an embassy extraordinary in France, and had said to Beaumont, the French Ambassador in England: "If I delay my departure, it is in order that I may not have to intervene in the trial of my relatives." However, early in January 1605, he suddenly decided that his mission would not admit of any further postponement, and on the 14th of that month he arrived in Paris.

"I am of opinion," wrote Villeroy to Beaumont "that he will refrain from interceding for his relatives, whose trial has advanced so far that judgment may be delivered this week. According to the information which I have had, they will all have need of his Majesty's mercy."[1]

But, greatly to the annoyance of the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Lennox, notwithstanding the fact that, before leaving England, he had assured Beaumont that he would not meddle with the affair, lost no time in interceding with the King in favour of the accused.

Villeroy had an interview with the duke and expressed his astonishment that he should have broken his word to Beaumont, to which the latter replied that, when it was given, he was under the impression that the King had discovered some new facts which aggravated the culpability of Entragues, but that, finding that such was not the case, "he had reason to think that his Majesty would take in good part all that he might be able to say to incline him to clemency." And he inquired what was to prevent the King from exercising his prerogative of mercy in favour of Entragues and his daughter.

The Minister dryly replied that, if he did so, his action would be attributed neither to his kindness nor to the duke's intercession, but to want of proofs and "to other considerations which had already been only too much discussed."

"Ah well!" said Lennox. "If his Majesty refuses me this favour, let him not expect to find me so attached to his interests with the King my master as I have been up to the present."

And with that the conversation ended.

On February 1, Villeroy wrote again to Beaumont:

"We are approaching the dénouement; there is no doubt that Entragues and the Comte d'Auvergne will be condemned to death. As for the marchioness, she has not been convicted of being mixed up in her father's plots, but only of having intended to leave France with her children."[1]

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[1] "Correspondance diplomatique de Beaumont," cited by La Ferrière.

Judgment was, in fact, delivered on the following day, when the Parlement, on the demand of the Procurator-General, declared Entragues, the Comte d'Auvergne and Thomas Morgan "attainted and convicted of the crime of high treason in the first degree," and ordered that they should be deprived of all their honours, dignities and possessions and have their heads cut off in the Place de Grève. Concerning Henriette d'Entragues, it directed that it should be "more fully informed" and that, meanwhile, she should be "conducted under good and sure guard to the Convent of Beaumont-lez-Tours," and remain there, "under pain of being declared convicted of the crime imputed to her, with injunction not to communicate with any other persons than the nuns." The sentence, however, was not to take effect immediately, Henri IV. having forbidden the court to go further.

The King, it is true, had at first appeared decided to make an example, for the conspiracy was flagrant, despite all the denials of the accused. But this good resolution had not lasted long, and during the trial he had caused Madame de Verneuil to be secretly informed that she would obtain her pardon if she demanded it. The marchioness, however, though aware that she would be perfectly safe to take at his word a monarch always so indulgent where pretty women were concerned, preferred to maintain her attitude of injured innocence and curtly replied that "she had never offended the King, and that when there was no offence, there could be no pardon."[2]

But Henri IV. persisted in his belief that eventually she would sue for his forgiveness, and from the moment that sentence was pronounced by the Parlement, his sole preoccupation was to ascertain what impression it had made upon Madame de Verneuil.

[1] "Correspondance diplomatique de Beaumont."

[2] L'Estoile.

According to his custom, he wished to consult Sully, and summoning him to the Louvre, inquired what course he thought the marchioness would take. The Minister, after having asked and received his master's permission to speak quite freely, replied that, in his opinion, if Madame de Verneuil believed that the King had been actuated merely by "amorous vexation," she was too cunning and too bold to be frightened by what had happened, "knowing well that they were only threats which would never be carried out." On the other hand, if she thought that his Majesty had no longer any affection for her, "she would be all submission and would employ every means to soften him, even supplications, having faith in the force of her tears and the voice of their children."

Henri IV. begged Sully to go and see the marchioness, as he was curious to know whether she would charge the Minister to plead her cause with him. But the other declined, on the plea that it might expose him to the enmity of the Queen and deprive him of the means of serving his Majesty later.

On the following day, as the King was on his way to Mass, the Comtesse d'Entragues and her younger daughter Marie, by many considered the most beautiful girl at the Court, presented themselves before him and threw themselves at his feet to implore his clemency. Touched by their despair, he courteously assisted them to rise and answered that he would endeavour to show them that he was a good King. He promised to assemble his Council that day in order to decide the question of pardon, and, with eyes dim with tears, said to the two ladies as he dismissed them: "Pray to God that He may be willing to inspire the Council well, and myself also, who am now going to Mass for that purpose."

But the Council had not the same reasons as the King for pardoning the guilty, and it unanimously declared that the judgment of the court ought to be executed.

Henri IV. remained undecided. The fact was that his decision was being entirely subordinated to the attitude which Madame de Verneuil might assume towards him. He had found that his new mistress, Jacqueline de Beuil, did not enable him to forget the old. She had, indeed, little save her physical attractions to recommend her, and was "a doll without intelligence, a body without a soul." "The corrupt perversity, the fiery temper, the biting tongue of Madame de Verneuil," writes one of his historians, "were more stimulating to his jaded taste than the cloying sweetness of a more beautiful but soulless courtesan. He felt that he must have his Henriette back, and all the more because she affected to scorn him and would not sue for mercy."[1]

But, if he allowed her father and half-brother's heads to be cut off, even he, dead as he was to all sense of seemliness, felt that he could scarcely again be Henriette's lover. At the same time, he did not propose to disregard the unanimous advice of his counsellors and spare lives which were so justly forfeit, until the marchioness chose to humble herself before him and he was assured of a renewal of their former relations, so soon as a reasonable interval had elapsed. He therefore availed himself of the pretext of a fresh intervention on the part of the Duke of Lennox to accord the accused a further respite, "in order," he writes to Beaumont, "to gratify him (Lennox) and oblige him to attach himself more to my interests and particularly to the maintenance of the good understanding between myself and his master,"[2] and waited for Henriette to make appeal to his clemency.

At length, the lady, perceiving that further resistance could serve no useful purpose, determined to take the step to which all this judicial comedy had tended, and addressed to the King the following epistle :

"Perhaps your Majesty will be offended to see this letter emerge from my prison after having commanded that she who sends it was not to be allowed to go out. But since it is ordinarily permitted even to the most culpable to say what they desire, I entreat you, Sire, at least to grant me this liberty of writing out of compassion for me. . . . I do not demand the opportunity of justifying myself by words, since my past actions are sufficient evidence of my intentions, and your own judgment suffices to enable you to determine my just reasons. I request only that it be permissible for my anguish to make you hear my lamentations, and truly it is very reasonable, since your Majesty wishes me to suffer this anguish, that he permits me at least to speak of it, in order that he may be able to say afterwards that I have not deserved it. There was a time when your Majesty received from me sweet kisses, instead of the bitter words which come from me now, and sighs of love instead of sobs of affliction. I was always close to your mouth, and, better still, to your soul . . . and if I opened my mouth to tell you something, it seemed to you that Heaven was opening to receive you. But all these past pleasures are now changed into mortifications, and I believe that I should never have possessed that great blessing which I did not deserve, if it were not to suffer also this great affliction which I do not deserve in any way, and should not have been the happiest woman of my time, unless to be afterwards the most unhappy; unhappy truly, since I have fallen from a place so high where love had lodged me, without love being dislodged in any way from my heart; unhappy because Heaven permits my condition to change, while my affection is not changed. I love as formerly; I burn with as much ardour as formerly, but not with as much felicity as I experienced before this last sorrow, because he who no longer loves anything save his own life seeks at this hour my death, or, if he does not desire it, he is the cause of it.

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[1] P. F. Willert, "Henry of Navarre and the Huguenots in France."

[2] "Correspondance diplomatique de Beaumont."

" You have never loved me, or, if you did, your love was but little ardent; or, if it were, at least am I assured that that heart quite unchangeable in danger is very changeable in its love. Our little children, young though they may be, do not fail to feel much resentment and grief, hearing my just lamentations before they understand themselves the reason of them. It seems that you ought to have compassion on me in having it on them. If you do not wish me to owe my liberty to my innocence, at least let it be due to your kindness, in the same manner as I am beholden to your past love, rather than to my own deserts. Thus, free in that way, I shall be more the slave of your Majesty, and much more his prisoner, when I shall be the least so."

This letter, notwithstanding its rigmarole, which, however, was very characteristic of the time, and its almost lachrymose sentimentality, was a masterpiece of feminine diplomacy, and it did not fail to have the effect which the writer desired. The King, in whom it had rekindled the fatal passion of which he was unable to cure himself, lost no time in signing an order for Henriette's unconditional liberation and gave her permission to retire to Verneuil, and, some weeks later, commuted the sentence of death which had been passed upon Entragues and Auvergne to one of perpetual imprisonment, and re-established them in possession of their property. In order to save appearances, he attributed the pardon to which he had been only too happy to consent to the intervention of the Duke of Lennox—"a thing," he wrote to Beaumont, "which I should have found difficult in granting to another, owing to the character of the crime; but I wished to oblige the duke out of respect for the King his master." As for Morgan, who had been a mere supernumerary in the affair, he profited by the clemency shown the chief conspirators and was set at liberty, on condition that he left the country.

Not long afterwards, Henri IV., with the idea, no doubt, of pleasing Madame de Verneuil, caused Entragues to be released from the Bastille and permitted him to retire to Malesherbes, where he was to be kept under observation. The Comte d'Auvergne, however, remained a prisoner and expiated his share in the conspiracy—or the accusations he had brought against his half-sister—by a captivity of nearly twelve years, as it was not until 1616 that Marie de' Medici, who wished to oppose him to the revolted nobles, set him at liberty.

Henri IV., however, was aware that some little time must be allowed to pass before he could resume his former relations with Madame de Verneuil, at any rate openly, and being, as we have said, somewhat weary of the Comtesse de Moret, he sought a new distraction with Catherine de Lorraine, Duchesse de Nevers. That lady's affections, however, happened to be engaged already, though not, it would appear, by their lawful owner, and, to his Majesty's mortification, she repulsed his propositions and, what was more, informed her husband. The duke took the affair in very bad part and sent one of his gentlemen to complain to the King in his name. The Vert-Galant excused himself as well as he could, but he was furious with the duchess. "Would you believe it," said he to his intimates, "this false prude has repeated all to her husband? She is more discreet when she gives rendezvous to Bellegarde."

The King was still smarting from the rebuff which he had experienced at the hands of Madame de Nevers when he received a letter from Henriette. The marchioness was still under the shadow of the decree of the Parlement which had ordered that it should be more fully informed in regard to her, and she now wrote to Henri IV. to entreat him to deliver her from this perpetual menace. Her letter, doubtless, contained renewed assurances of her affection and her entire submission to his Majesty's wishes, very gratifying to one whose *amour-propre* had just been so deeply wounded. Anyway, he hastened to do as she desired, and towards the middle of September sent to the Parlement the following document for registration :

"Our Procurator-General has had sufficient time to bring new charges. Since the actions of Madame de Verneuil have given to all complete satisfaction, and as she has desired nothing so much as to be justified of the matter of which she is accused ; as also we do not ignore the particular affection wherewith we have honoured her, it would be unjust for her to remain all her life in a state of uncertainty. Recollecting the affection which we have borne her and the children whom we have had by her, and being sufficiently enlightened concerning what has passed in this affair, we have desired and desire that all proceedings and investigations shall cease entirely, and that she shall be at full liberty both as to her person and property. And we impose silence on all our procurators-general present and to come and enjoin our trusty servants of our court of the Parlement to register the present letters."

Madame de Verneuil was thus legally rehabilitated, but, impatient though Henri IV. might be to renew their liaison, he did not as yet venture to do so. Early in January 1606, however, he permitted her to come to Saint-Germain to see her children, and, encouraged by this concession, the marchioness demanded authorisation to return to Paris and reside there as she had formerly. This request the King refused, though sorely against his will,[1] and Henriette did not press him, but resolved to watch for the first favourable opportunity. Nor had she to wait very long.

On June 9, the King and Queen, accompanied by the Princesse de Conti and the Ducs de Vendôme and de Montpensier, were returning from Saint-Germain to Paris in a coach drawn by six horses. On arriving at Neuilly, where they had to cross the Seine, it was raining heavily, in consequence of which the royal party decided not to alight ; but, as the coach was entering the ferry-boat, one of the shaft-horses slipped and fell, dragging down the other and overturning the coach and its occupants into the river, which at this point was narrow, but very deep. The attendants who were following on horseback flung themselves into the river to rescue the King, who, however, being a good swimmer, bade them go to the assistance of the Queen. Marie de' Medici would appear to have been in considerable danger, until André de Vivonne, Sieur de la Châtaigneraie, seized her by the hair and drew her to the bank,[1] which the other occupants of the coach had no difficulty in reaching. There was considerable delay before another coach could be procured to take their Majesties to Paris, but though the Queen, " who had drunk more water than she would have wished," kept her bed for two days, neither of them suffered any ill effects from their immersion.

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[1] According to M. Merki, the cause of Henri IV.'s refusal was his irritation at the conduct of Entragues, who was found to be continuing from Malesherbes his correspondence with Spain and was also suspected of having concerted a plan to enable the Comte d'Auvergne to escape from the Bastille.

As soon as she was informed of this mishap, Madame de Verneuil hastened to Paris, where she was received in secret by the King.

" Sire," said she, as she threw herself into his arms, " my joy at learning that you had escaped such a danger must be my excuse. If I had had the misfortune to lose your Majesty, I should have fallen into the hands of the Queen, who detests me."

And, being unable to resist the temptation of a *bon mot*, she added : " Oh my King, if I had been there, when I saw you out of danger, I should have cried : ' The Queen drinks ! ' "[2]

This malicious speech was duly reported to Marie de' Medici and revived all the animosity which Henriette's disgrace had temporarily appeased. So exasperated was her Majesty that she shut herself up in her private apartments and sent to inform her husband that she should decline to leave them so long as the marchioness

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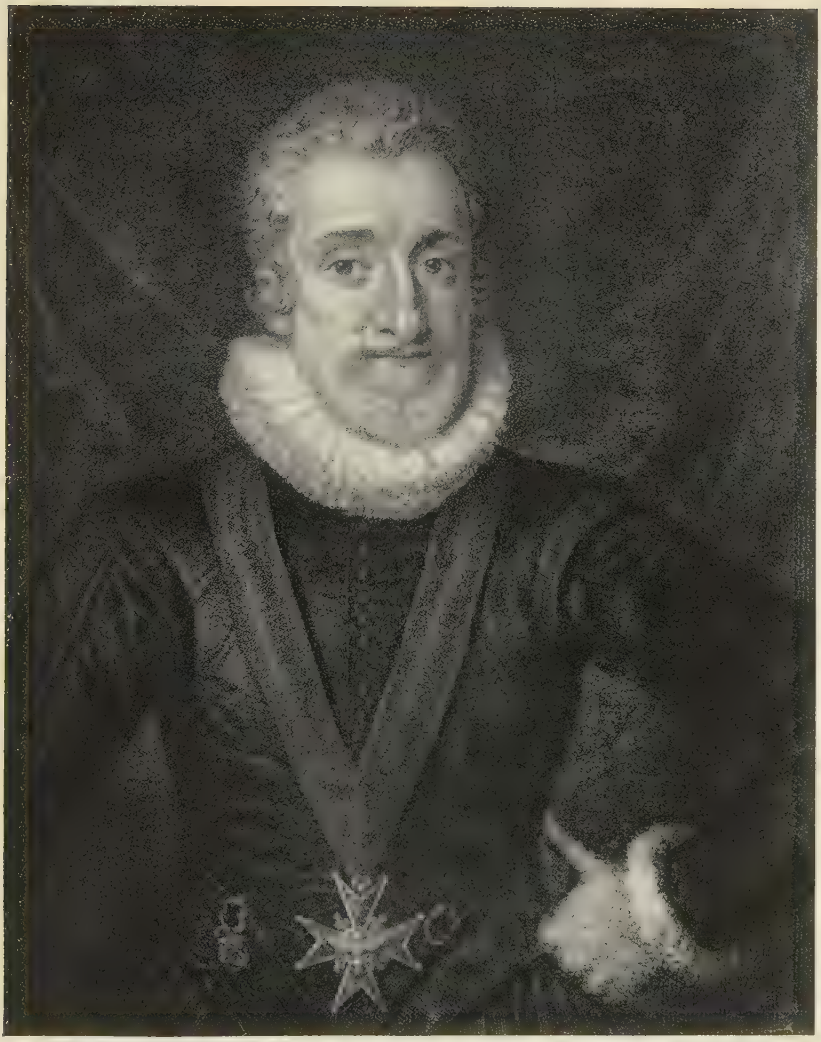
[1] For this service La Châtaigneraie received from Marie de' Medici a present of jewels to the value of 4,000 écus. He was also granted an annual pension, and was subsequently appointed Captain of the Queen's Guards.

[2] L'Estoile.



Henri IV., King of France.

From an engraving after the painting by Porbus.

[*To face p.* 182.

remained in Paris. Finding that she intended to keep her word, the King gave way and regretfully sent his mistress back to Verneuil. But, after this brief reunion, he found it harder than ever to live without her, and accordingly begged the Queen to consent to her return to Paris, on condition that she should come incognito and should not show herself to anyone.

"No," answered Marie angrily, "this creature is so bold and so ambitious that she would never rest until she had succeeded in seeing you in public. I will not submit to this affront."

And she even went so far as to forbid the ladies of the Court to visit Madame de Verneuil, under pain of finding the door of her Majesty's apartments closed to them.

As the Queen was again in an interesting condition, Henri IV. felt obliged to humour her and to derive what consolation he might from resuming with Henriette the passionate correspondence of the early days of their liaison.

"I think only of pleasing you and of strengthening our love," he writes to her on October 6, 1606. "We are having fine weather here, but everywhere, save when near you, I am so bored that I am unable to endure it. Find some means whereby I may see you in private."

New and substantial favours accompanied these tender epistles, and on the death of the poet Desportes, Abbé de Tiron, the numerous benefices which he had possessed were conferred on the little Duc de Verneuil, which, of course, meant that for a good many years to come his mother would enjoy their revenues. Encouraged by such proofs of the royal affection, Madame de Verneuil decided that she was now strong enough to dethrone her rivals and accordingly demanded the dismissal of Madame de Moret. But the King could not as yet make up his mind to discard a lady whose favours he had purchased at so high a price and of whose society he might be glad when Henriette happened to be spiteful and his consort sulky; and all that the marchioness could extract from him were vague promises that her wishes should be complied with.

"She (Madame de Moret) shall go soon," he writes, "but do not say anything about it, for word is sent to Paris of everything that you say."

And, to persuade her to have patience, he sent Sillery to her with a considerable sum of money to render the counsels which he was charged to give her more palatable.

As time goes on, the monarch's letters grow more and more passionate, so much so, indeed, that in some cases it would be quite impossible to transcribe them literally.

"Away from your presence," he writes to her on October 23, "I have no more joy than there is salvation away from the Church." And having learned that Henriette proposed to pay a visit to her parents at Marcoussis, he announces his intention of joining her there and hopes that she will lend him "*la moitié de votre lit*." "Good-bye, my soul," he concludes, "I kiss you a million times."

The marchioness having adjourned this rendezvous, on November 3 he writes again:

> "I shall have the pleasure of seeing you to-morrow without fail. I desire it more than you, for I love you more than you love me. Pretend to be ill . . . and make up your mind to pay your footing so soon as you arrive. . . ."[1]

Singular to relate, the incorrigible Vert-Galant, while resuming his relations with Madame de Verneuil and apparently more infatuated with her than ever, not only declined to part at her bidding with Madame de Moret, but proceeded to extend the resources of his seraglio by the addition of a third sultana. The lady in question was Charlotte des Essarts, Mlle. de la Haye,[2] daughter of François des Essarts, Lieutenant-General of the King in Champagne, who had contrived to make her royal admirer believe that she was a novice in this *métier*, which, as we shall presently see, was very far from being the case.

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[1] "Lettres-Missives."

[2] La Haye would appear to have been an estate belonging to the Des Essarts. Daughters of noble families not infrequently took the name of one of their father's estates.

Early in 1607, his Majesty, in order to escape the surveillance of the Queen and the keener eyes of Henriette, shut himself up with his new conquest at Chantilly, obligingly placed at his disposal by the Connétable de Montmorency, under the pretext of enjoying the excellent hunting which the neighbourhood afforded. However, despite these precautions, the affair was very soon an open secret, and on March 21, the poet Malherbe, who was usually well informed about what was happening in high circles, writes to one of his friends :

> " Mlle. de la Haye yesterday bravely hunted the stag. There are many different reports respecting her favour. However that may be, her establishment is arranged. The King has furnished it with tapestries and silver plate. For the silver and the presents some say two thousand livres, others three thousand."

The Queen appears to have decided to ignore this fresh escapade on the part of her volatile husband, as she had in the case of Madame de Moret. The explanation is that Marie de' Medici resented her husband's infidelities far less when she shared his attentions with several women than when she dreaded the dangerous influence of Henriette de Entragues alone. It is also probable that, provided that lady remained at a distance from the Court, the irregularity of the King's conduct was not altogether displeasing to her, since it obliged him to purchase her complaisance by shutting his eyes to her extravagant generosity to her unworthy Italian favourites, Leonora Galigaï and Concini, and the unbounded influence they exercised over her.

As for Madame de Verneuil, not a little to the King's relief, she appeared to regard the affair with contemptuous indifference, and, when he came to see her, instead of making a scene, contented herself with a *bon mot.*

"Your Majesty," said she, "has very bad quartermasters; *ils vous logent à la haye, au vent et à la pluie.*" [1]

The marchioness had, in fact, very speedily summed up Mlle. de la Haye, and did not even condescend to show herself jealous of what she felt confident was nothing but a *passade.* Nor was her judgment at fault, since Henri IV. was already growing weary of his new toy when, some weeks later, an incident occurred which precipitated her disgrace.

It appeared that this pretended novice had inaugurated her career of gallantry by an intrigue with M. de Beaumont, who had lately been replaced at the English Court by the Comte de la Boderie, and had exchanged with him numerous tender letters. Discarded after a short while by the diplomatist, she had not forgiven him their rupture, and believing herself more in favour than she was in reality, she ventured to criticize his conduct during his recent embassy. Informed of this, Beaumont retaliated by sending the letters which his former mistress had written him to the King, who, angry at discovering how he had been deceived, at once determined to break with Mlle. de la Haye. The lady, however, declared that she was enceinte, and though Henri IV. was at first under the impression that this was only a pretext to gain time and save herself from too abrupt a dismissal, it proved to be correct. The King accordingly sent her to Le Tressoir, a little country-house belonging to him about two leagues from Fontainebleau, where in due course she gave birth to twin daughters.[2]

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[1] L'Estoile.

[2] Both were legitimated and, when they grew up, entered religion and were provided with rich abbeys, one Jeanne Baptiste de Bourbon, becoming Abbess of Fontevrault, while her sister, Marie Henriette de Bourbon, was Abbess of Chelles.

On her recovery, Charlotte des Essarts, who had been created Comtesse de Romorantin, was pardoned and restored to the royal favour, or, at any rate, to a measure of it. But "having been accused," Malherbe tells us, "of permitting herself to be visited by M. de Reims,"[1] she decided to anticipate her inevitable disgrace by demanding the King's permission to retire to the Convent of Beaumont-les-Dames. This request was at once granted, but the lady does not appear to have remained in the convent very long, and on her return to the world formed a connection with the Archbishop of Rheims which was the cause of much scandal. This prelate secretly married her with a dispensation from the Pope and had by her three sons and two daughters, who, however, were declared illegitimate. He died in 1621, and, after several gallant adventures, Charlotte des Essarts contracted a second marriage with Du Hallier, governor of Nancy.

Madame de Moret, who in 1607 presented the King with a fine boy,[2] was also giving his Majesty abundant cause for jealousy, and, singularly enough, the first trouble was occasioned by a brother of the ecclesiastic who had been responsible for the rupture with Charlotte des Essarts. The Prince de Joinville, who, it will be remembered, had been sent to Hungary to fight the Turks, after his intrigues amorous and political of which we have spoken elsewhere, had recently returned to the Court. Here he met Madame de Moret, and having decided that, as she was deemed worthy of his sovereign's affection, she must also be worthy of his, straightway proceeded to lay siege to her heart, which capitulated after a very brief resistance. But there were always too many people interested in keeping an eye upon the favourites of the King for the affair to be kept secret for long, however many precautions might be taken, and Henri IV. soon got wind of it. He lost no time in taxing the countess with her infidelity, which she most strenuously denied, but he left her only partly convinced of her innocence and in a very ill humour, and wrote to Sully:

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[1] Louis de Lorraine, Cardinal Archbishop of Rheims, a son of the Duc de Guise who was assassinated at Blois.

[2] Antoine de Bourbon, Comte de Moret. He was legitimated in 1608, and provided with four rich abbeys. In after years he showed much promise as a soldier, but was killed at Castelnaudery in 1632, at the age of twenty-five.

> "Although I have parted on bad terms with her, I do not fail to be curious to know the truth of a rumour which is being circulated here that the Prince de Joinville is visiting her. Ascertain the truth about it and send it me in a note, which I will burn, as you will do with this."

We do not know what report Sully sent his master, but, anyway, it must have served to confirm his suspicions, since he endeavoured to surprise the lovers. But having communicated his intention to Bassompierre, that gentleman, who was on friendly terms with both Joinville and Madame de Moret, secretly warned them to be on their guard, and the attempt failed. However, the countess, perceiving that it would be useless to deny that she had been receiving visits from Joinville, told the King that he ought not to take umbrage at the court which the prince was paying her, since his intentions were perfectly honourable and he had promised to marry her. Thereupon his Majesty sent for Joinville's mother, Catherine de Clèves, Duchesse de Guise, and began to inveigh against her son, saying that he had abused the indulgence which had been shown him; that, as one of the accomplices of Biron, he deserved to be languishing in the Bastille, to which he would most assuredly go if he did not keep his promise to the Comtesse de Moret. The duchess inquired what promise he had made Madame de Moret.

"To marry her," rejoined the King, "and it is only at that price that I am willing to overlook his conduct.

. . . Let him marry my mistress, well and good! But let him not continue to play the gallant with her, for that is what I will not suffer. If I pardon the prince, it is because he is your son and you are my relative."[1]

But the Duchesse de Guise, who did not want for spirit, took up the cudgels on behalf of her son, and declared her intention of doing everything in her power to prevent him from committing such a misalliance as the King wished to force upon him.

The conversation grew heated and terminated by Henri IV. vowing that he would have Joinville arrested; and the only concession which his relatives were able to obtain was that he should leave the kingdom. And so, for the third time, this too susceptible prince took the road to exile and set out for Nancy.

" He is at this moment in Lorraine," writes Puisieux to La Boderie, the French Ambassador in England, " very greatly embarrassed. That is to pay dearly for his passions. If he comes to London, it is sufficient for you to know that he has not been prudent."

And L'Estoile notes in his " Journal":

" The Prince de Joinville leaves the Court and retires to Saint-Dizier, fortified place of his government. Disgraced by his Majesty on suspicion of some *amourettes* between him and the Comtesse de Moret, an ordinary and too common reason to-day for the disgraces of our Court."

Scarcely had Joinville departed than Madame de Moret took another gallant, a young Breton gentleman named Grandbois, who was a near relative of the Grand Equerry Bellegarde. The affair, however, would not appear to have been conducted with much discretion, as it was soon discovered, and " the young lover was forbidden to visit her."[2]

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[1] The Duchesse de Guise was his first cousin, her mother, Marguerite de Bourbon, Duchesse de Nivernais, having been an aunt of Henri IV.

[2] Malherbe.

After this new infidelity, Henri IV., though he did not dismiss Madame de Moret, felt obliged to place her in a sort of semi-disgrace and to abstain from visiting her for a time, in consequence of which he found himself almost forced to return to Madame de Verneuil.

CHAPTER XII

Henri IV. obtains for the little Duc de Verneuil the reversion of the Archbishopric of Metz—Birth of the future Gaston d'Orléans—The King spends ten days in Paris with Henriette—Flat refusal of the Connétable de Montmorency to consider the question of a marriage between his son and the marchioness's daughter—Anger of Madame de Verneuil, who lays the blame upon the King—Passionate letter of Henri IV., who is unable to perceive that the marchioness remains his mistress merely for the sake of the material advantages she derives from the position—The Queen and the favourite again at war—Intervention of Sully—Change in the tone of the King's letters to Henriette—He reproaches her with her coldness and indifference to his wishes—And finally declares that "her ingratitude has overwhelmed his passion"—Love-affair between Madame de Verneuil and the Duc de Guise, whom she induces to sign a marriage-contract with her—Indignation of the duke's relatives—Henri IV. intervenes and orders Guise to retire to his government of Provence—Intrigue of Madame de Moret with the Comte de Sommerive—Unpleasant consequences to a gentleman who has threatened to inform the King—Sommerive is exiled and dies of fever at Naples.

IN order to avoid fresh squabbles with the Queen, Henri IV. had not yet authorized Madame de Verneuil to take up her residence in Paris, but he eagerly availed himself of every opportunity of seeing her. In March 1608, the little Duc de Verneuil was taken ill with measles at Saint-Germain, upon which he wrote suggesting that this would provide her with an admirable pretext for coming to Paris. And as the marchioness delayed her visit, he reproached her with "having lost a fine occasion of giving herself the means of seeing him without inconvenience." "You have shown," he continues, "the indifference with which you regard me by your feeble excuses. Let your interest, then, be the cause which will enable me to see you. Le Maire will tell you the reasons for which it is necessary."[1]

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[1] "Lettres-Missives."

The King, in fact, was at that moment endeavouring to obtain for his son by Henriette the Archbishopric of Metz, the revenues of which were believed to be worth 100,000 livres, on the death of the Cardinal Charles de Lorraine. The Pope at first refused the necessary dispensations, but eventually the affair was terminated to the satisfaction of the marchioness.

As the Queen was expecting shortly to be brought to bed, and he feared, in the circumstances, to give her any cause for irritation, for the next few weeks Henri IV. felt obliged to refrain from seeing his mistress, but he continued to bombard her with passionate epistles.

"I am unable," he writes on April 12, "to pass a day without making you think of me. I do not repent of it, but, on the contrary, I wish to love you more than I ever did; but also I wish to be yours without exception or modification."

On April 25 Marie de' Medici gave birth to a son, the future Gaston d'Orléans, who was to cause so much trouble during the succeeding reign, and so soon as she was pronounced out of danger, the enamoured monarch, burning with impatience, hurried off to Paris, where Henriette was awaiting him.

"He has passed ten days with her," writes the Venetian Ambassador. "She has demanded of him three things: her return to the Court, the guardianship of her children, and, finally, the town of Metz, of which her son is bishop, as a place of surety."

Of these three things, however, the marchioness did not obtain even one, the King putting her off with promises which she knew very well he had no intention of fulfilling. To add to her mortification, she had conceived the idea of betrothing her daughter to the son of the Constable, which would, of course, be a most brilliant match for the girl. But to the first overtures which were made to him, Montmorency replied by a flat refusal, couched in terms very offensive for the mother. Henriette laid the blame upon the King, who, she considered, ought to have brought pressure to bear upon the Constable to induce him to consent to her wishes, and, in great wrath, took herself off to Verneuil.

With the idea, doubtless, of touching the heart of his mistress, Henri IV. wrote reminding her of the happy days which they had spent together at Malesherbes at the beginning of their intimacy:

"My dear heart, your mother and your sister are at Beaumont, where I am invited to dine to-morrow; I will write you news of them. A hare led me to the rocks opposite Malesherbes, where I experienced that 'the remembrance of past pleasures is sweet.' I longed to have you in my arms, as I have held you there. Bear it in mind in reading my letter. I am assured that this memory of the past will make you despise all the present, at least you would do so were you to traverse the roads over which I have passed to visit you. . . . My dear love, if I sleep, my dreams are of you; if I wake, my thoughts are the same. Receive, thus prepared, a million kisses from me."[1]

"Blinded by that eternal confidence of lovers," writes one of Henri IV.'s historians, "who always persuade themselves that the heart of their mistress beats in unison with theirs, he did not perceive that the marchioness had arrived at satiety."[2] Although he was now in his fifty-fifth year and looked a great deal older, and for the reasons which we have mentioned elsewhere, his person must have been, not only unattractive, but positively repulsive, to any woman of refinement; although nothing was more certain than that Henriette had conspired against his kingdom, if not against his life, with the enemies of France; although he had had superabundant proof that she remained his mistress merely for the material advantages which she might derive from the position, he was, extraordinary as it may seem, still under the illusion that she loved him; whereas the vindictive creature, furious at not having been able to obtain all that she expected from her restoration to favour, was seeking only to avenge her disappointed hopes.

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[1] "Lettres-Missives," May 22, 1608.

[2] La Ferrière, "Henri IV."

Not being able to attack the husband directly, she once more took the offensive against the wife, which afforded her the twofold satisfaction of annoying the woman whom she hated and, at the same time, destroying the King's domestic peace. On this occasion she would appear to have placed no restraint whatever upon her venomous tongue, and her gibes, which were, of course, duly reported to Marie de' Medici, goaded the latter to the point of frenzy. Her Majesty retaliated in like manner and expressed her opinion of Madame de Verneuil with the utmost candour; and the friends of both ladies joining in the fray, the Court was again divided into two hostile camps, each apparently determined to make all the mischief it could.

Henri IV., bombarded as usual by incessant complaints from wife and mistress, sent for Sully and persuaded him, much against his will, to undertake the ungrateful part of mediator. The Minister accordingly proceeded to the Queen's apartments, where he found Marie de' Medici engaged in drawing up a long letter to her husband, wherein she set forth her grievances—they all concerned Madame de Verneuil—and called upon him to redress them without delay. This, when completed, she submitted to Sully, who found it a little too outspoken and persuaded her to allow him to dictate another, which he sent to the King, who was on a visit to the Constable at Chantilly. The letter, which, while perfectly respectful in tone, made very plain to his Majesty the extent of his own responsibility for the unfortunate state of affairs which prevailed, did not, as the Minister had, of course, foreseen, prove at all palatable to his master, who wrote bidding him ascertain who was its author, as it had evidently been dictated. On his return from Chantilly, Henri IV. went to see Sully, handed him the letter and asked him what he thought about it. The other, after pretending to read it, inquired what there was in it to which his Majesty took exception. The King replied that it seemed a very well-written letter, "full of excuses, humilities and submissions," but that, even while flattering him, it galled him; that, taking it sentence by sentence, he would not know where to find fault with it, but that, as a whole, it annoyed him and would annoy him still more if it were made public. And he expressed the opinion that it was probably the work, not of the Queen, but of one of her intimates, and wished to know if Sully had any idea who it was. The Minister was then obliged to admit that he himself was the author, and producing the rough draft of the letter, laid it before the King, who took the jest in very good part and began to laugh.

Henri IV. then charged Sully to see the Queen again and urge her to exercise more restraint where Madame de Verneuil was concerned, and endeavour to persuade her to get rid of Concini and his wife. He was also to visit Henriette and advise her to remain quiet and to be more guarded in her language, if she did not wish to be shut up in a convent.[1] But, unfortunately, all the Minister's trouble was wasted, for, though both ladies were ready enough to promise amendment, they had no intention of keeping their word, and, besides, there were too many people interested in maintaining the dissensions in the Royal Family, notably the Concini, who knew very well that a permanent reconciliation between the King and Queen would almost certainly mean their dismissal.

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[1] This statement of Sully concerning the King's intentions in regard to Henriette, as M. Merki points out, appears to be contradicted by a letter which Henri IV. wrote to the lady at this moment: "My dear heart, I arrived yesterday evening at five o'clock. I have not found any alteration. Bonneuil, who came in this morning, tried to speak to my wife of my journeys to Verneuil. She said to him: 'The King is all powerful; I do not wish to know anything about it.' She has followed M. de Sully's advice to interrupt all the tales which they try to tell her. We shall leave here Friday; if you are willing to come Thursday evening, I should have the boon of seeing you before leaving. . . . Love me well, my dear heart."

Notwithstanding all the domestic unpleasantness of which she was the cause, Madame de Verneuil continued in high favour, and Henri IV.'s letters to her as passionate as ever :

" I shall give the rest of the day to my pleasure, which will be to see you, to kiss you and to embrace you."

And again :

" Believe that I love you more dearly than all that is in the world ; if you are wise, you will be able to keep me in this state."

And in a third letter :

" My heart, I envy the bearer of this because he will enjoy your presence. . . . I begin to believe that you love me ; as for me, my heart, do not doubt that I love you more than all the rest of the world. I swear it to you and will prove it to you by my actions."

But, as the year 1608 draws towards its close, the tone of his Majesty's letters changes and they become full of complaints and reproaches.

" I beg you," he writes, " to increase my contentment instead of troubling it. You are able to do it, you ought to do it, you must be willing to do it."

In another letter he informs her that he proposes to come to Paris to see her. She replies that she is on the point of returning to Verneuil. Wounded to the quick, he writes :

" You threaten me with your going away to Verneuil ; do so if it will please you. If you do not love me, I shall be very glad not to see you ; if you say you love me, it is a bad proof of it to go away when I arrive. With this truth, I kiss your hands. . . . I shall be in Paris on Thursday, as badly satisfied with you, if you do not change your tone, as ever I was."

The marchioness's reply would not appear to have done much to mend matters, for a few days later he writes again :

"You show plainly, my dear heart, your nature by your letter, which, instead of appreciating and cherishing the demonstrations of my affection, calls them 'baits to deceive.' Thus shall I waste all my life the attentions which I shall render you. . . . God grant that it may not be so, and that henceforth you pay me according to my worth."

Madame de Verneuil's treatment of her royal admirer continued to be very far from what the latter considered that he had the right to expect, for in another letter he declares that she has "deprived him of everything that she could." He loves her so dearly that he himself is of no account in comparison, but let her not think "to nourish him with stones after having given him bread." "Consider," he continues, "my age, my rank, my mind and my affection, and you will do what you do not do."

The lady apparently sought to excuse herself, but, meantime, the King had learned certain things which had greatly displeased him, for he writes again :

"Your fine words are well received by me when they are preceded by actions, but when they are only intended to cover your shortcomings, I regard them as deceitful. I found this morning at Mass prayers in Spanish in our son's hands ; he told me that you had given them to him. I only wish him to know that there is a Spain ; and it has proved so unlucky for you that you ought to desire that the memory of it should be lost. I have not for a long time been so unpleasantly enlightened in regard to you as I am ; I believe that you trouble little about it. I should desire to see you, for I have discovered many things ; but, since you have other considerations, manage your affairs as may please you."

And then comes a letter which might almost be regarded as a definite *congé*, if we did not know that Madame de Verneuil continued in the good graces of the monarch—though henceforth only as a sort of intermittent mistress—almost to the end of his life :

> "It is not my indolence which deprives you of news of me, but the belief which five years have forcibly impressed upon me that you do not love me. Your actions, during that time, have been so contrary to your words, and, let us say more, to the love which you owe me, that finally your ingratitude has overwhelmed my passion, which has resisted more than it could have done in the case of any other."

There can, we think, be very little doubt, from more than one phrase in these letters, that the chief cause of the King's annoyance with Madame de Verneuil was his discovery of a new adventure upon which that lady had recently embarked.

Henriette, together with her younger sister Marie, who was already following in her footsteps, was in the habit of visiting the wealthy banker Barthélemy Cénamy —the "Marquis des Millions," as he was called—at his sumptuous villa at Conflans, where he was accustomed to entertain the princes and nobles of the Court. The Duc de Guise was also a frequent visitor at Conflans, particularly when the Entragues sisters happened to be there, the reason being that he had fallen in love with Marie. But the latter's heart had already been subjugated by Bassompierre, who knew how to take care of his conquest, and the duke could make no impression upon it. Henriette, who would have greatly preferred him to the confidant of Henri IV., could not bring herself to allow so great a *parti* to escape, and devoted herself to the task of making him forget her sister. She succeeded so well that presently the susceptible prince was even more enamoured of her than he had been of Marie d'Entragues, and "passed entire nights beneath her windows." He was thus surprised by Bassompierre, who was on his way to visit his mistress, and Madame de Verneuil, being at once informed, " simulated compassion and permitted him some liberties." Finally, she conceived the idea of making him marry her, and, while waiting until she could disengage herself from her liaison with Henri IV., she sought to bind him by a promise of marriage. It was to return to the point from which she had started and to play again the game which she had played with the King.

So skilfully did she manœuvre that the duke was soon ready to agree to anything, but, warned by her first adventure, she decided to have something more binding than a mere promise, and accordingly lost no time in causing the banns to be published, contenting herself by veiling the real names under transparent pseudonyms, a practice which appears to have been not uncommon at this epoch. Next, she had the marriage-contract drawn up by two notaries, who signed the document, and had it initialled by a priest. Finally, she affixed her own signature to it and made the Duc de Guise affix his.

The affair was soon an open secret, and on January 3, 1609, we find La Boderie, the French Ambassador in London, writing to Villeroy :

> " The Ambassador of England (in Paris) has sent word that M. de Guise is marrying the marchioness, and some rather indiscreet words in regard to this matter have escaped from the Queen of England's mouth. She has sent the marchioness a box of diamonds on which is her portrait, as she has done for the Princesse de Conti."

From Conflans, the scene of all these intrigues, Villeroy replied on February 20 :

> " As for the understanding between the Queen of Great Britain, the Marquise de Verneuil and M. de Guise, I shall not tell you anything else for the present, but I am certainly of opinion that you should act discreetly concerning it."

But the matter went no further for the time being, since the old Duchesse de Guise and other relatives of the duke were furious when they learned of what was in the wind, and loudly proclaimed their opinion that it was nothing but a manœuvre of Madame de Verneuil to embroil the Guise family with Henri IV., to say nothing of the disgrace of such a misalliance. Finally the King intervened,[1] and, having severely reprimanded the duke for his conduct, sent him to his government of Provence, with orders to remain there.

The mistresses of Henri IV. appeared to possess an irresistible attraction for the members of the younger branch of the House of Lorraine, for, shortly afterwards, Madame de Moret, tempted by one of those lying promises of marriage which the King had made fashionable, allowed herself to be courted by the Comte de Sommerive, younger son of the Duc de Mayenne. A friend of the lady, a M. de la Borde, took upon himself to remonstrate with her upon this new love-affair, and told her that, if it continued, he should feel obliged to inform the King. On learning of this threat, Sommerive, in high indignation at such impertinent interference, caused La Borde to be waylaid by his lackeys and severely beaten.

This incident greatly diverted the Court, but Henri IV. took it very seriously indeed.

"In truth," said he to Sully, "the best of this race (the Guises) is worthless, and I have a good mind to deal severely with him."

The Duc de Mayenne and his elder son came to the King to intercede for the culprit; but his Majesty turned a deaf ear to their entreaties, and Sommerive was exiled, as Joinville had been. Less fortunate than that gentleman, who had proceeded to England and was having a very pleasant time at the Court of James I., he went to Naples, where he died from an attack of fever. It was to pay dearly indeed for tasting forbidden fruit.

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[1] It was when first informed of this affair that Henri IV. is reported to have observed: "Well, we must leave the nobles bread and harlots, as they have been deprived of so many other things."

CHAPTER XIII

The last love of Henri IV.—Charlotte de Montmorency—Contemporary descriptions of her beauty—Her betrothal to Bassompierre—The Duc de Bouillon, out of hostility to Bassompierre, urges the King to marry her to the Prince de Condé, First Prince of the Blood—Mlle. de Montmorency, with other ladies of the Court, visits his Majesty while he is laid up with the gout—Henri IV. falls madly in love with the girl and resolves to appropriate her for himself—His conversation with Bassompierre, who is obliged to relinquish his betrothed to the Prince de Condé, whom his Majesty hopes to find tractable—Marriage of Condé and Charlotte de Montmorency—The infatuation of the King for the young princess becomes the talk of Court and town—Condé declines to accept the odious rôle intended for him—And, after a stormy interview with the King, leaves the Court with his wife—He returns in order to attend the marriage of the Duc de Vendôme and Mlle. de Mercœur—But, after another violent altercation with his Majesty, carries off the princess to his Château of Muret, in Picardy—Henri IV. follows his inamorata in disguise—Adventure at a country-house—Condé determines to leave France with his wife—But dissimulates his intention and promises to bring the princess to the Court—A messenger arrives in Paris with the news that the Prince and Princesse de Condé are on their way to Flanders—Consternation of the King—Despite the advice of Sully, he sends troops and police in pursuit of the fugitives—Refusal of the authorities of Landrecies to surrender them—The princess is authorized to take up her residence with the Princess of Orange at Brussels, and Condé makes his way to Cologne.

IT is very improbable that Madame de Verneuil would ever have ventured to risk the favour of Henri IV. by an intrigue with the Duc de Guise, much less have attempted to inveigle that nobleman into a secret marriage, had not chance given her a rival in the royal affections infinitely more formidable than Charlotte des Essarts or Madame de Moret, and she had felt convinced that the empire which she had exercised for more than eight years was practically at an end.

A manuscript preserved in the Dupuy collection in the Bibliothèque Nationale relates that at the time of the birth of his younger son, Gaston, Duc d'Orléans, (April 25, 1608), Henri IV. conceived the idea of having the child's horoscope drawn, and, for this purpose, sent for Cosmo Ruggieri, an astrologer who had been much in vogue in the time of Charles IX. and Catherine de' Medici, but had since fallen into neglect. With the old necromancer's predictions so far as they affect the young prince we need not concern ourselves, but the closing sentence in the answer which he gave the King is of interest:

"This nativity, Sire, augments the time of your pleasures, but more with insipid youth than with others, for, as has several times been written, there are dealings with women entirely contrary to the welfare and repose of the State. I believe also, from this nativity, that soon you will have some new love, who will cause you to forget or to abandon all former affections."

This "new love"—this child—whom Ruggieri foretold, and "who was to amuse herself by playing with the King's heart as she had lately played with her doll,"[1] was Charlotte de Montmorency, daughter of the Constable by his second wife, a woman of such extraordinary beauty that she passed for being bewitched and for having the power to bewitch others.[2]

Charlotte, who had made her first appearance at the Court in the spring of 1608, while only in her sixteenth year, had inherited her mother's beauty. "From the time that she was four years old," writes Tallemant des Réaux, "it was clearly seen that she would be an accomplished beauty." She had "blonde hair, a full figure, a perfect face." Malherbe has consecrated to her praise these flattering verses:

"A quelles roses ne fait honte
De son teint la vive fraîcheur ?
Quelle neige a tant de blancheur
Que sa gorge ne la surmonte ?
Et quelle flamme luit aux cieux
Claire et nette comme ses yeux ?"

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[1] La Ferrière.

[2] She died in a strange and mysterious fashion at Chantilly in 1598, and, according to a chronicle of the time, "the devil, who had endowed her with her astonishing and dangerous beauty, had strangled her."

And the Cardinal di Bentivoglio declares that she was "marvellously fair and possessed in her eyes and her countenance incomparable charms."[1]

The girl was betrothed to Bassompierre, the most dashing gallant of the Court. The King had given his consent to the marriage, and had promised to make his favourite First Gentleman of his Chamber, in place of Charlotte de Montmorency's uncle, the Duc de Bouillon, the nominal occupant of the post, who was to be induced to surrender it in return for a sum of 100,000 livres. But the duke disliked Bassompierre, and, irritated by some fancied slight which he had received at the hands of that gentleman, he roundly declared that he should have neither his niece nor his office, and, profiting by the illness of the Constable, which had caused the marriage to be postponed, he began to intrigue to prevent it. He therefore spoke to the King of the Prince de Condé, the First Prince of the Blood, who was now of an age to be married, and pointed out that the only suitable wife for him was Mlle. de Montmorency. If he did not marry her, he would be obliged to remain unmarried, unless he espoused one of the Guises or some foreign princess, which would, for political reasons, be very undesirable. And he ended by making the monarch share his views and, at the same time, giving him the idea of a new love-adventure.

The Prince de Condé was a posthumous son of Henri de Bourbon, second prince of that name, who had died in March 1588, poisoned, according to common report, by his second wife, Catherine Charlotte de la Trémouille, with the assistance of a page named Belcastel and other persons. Although the fact of poisoning was not proved, the doctors who performed the autopsy having been unable to agree, the princess was imprisoned and was not released until seven years later, when the proceedings against her were annulled by the Parlement of Paris and she was declared innocent. The little prince was born on September 1, 1588, six months after his father's death, but Henri IV. at first refused to recognize him as Prince de Condé, and he was almost regarded as a bastard. In 1595, however, the King, who had as yet no legitimate heir, decided to accept him, and had him brought up as a Catholic prince, in accordance with a promise made to the Pope, and declared his successor. But the recognition of his rights had been for Henri IV. merely a political expedient, and when, after the birth of the future Louis XIII., the prince ceased to be the heir to the throne, he became a comparatively unimportant personage, since he was very poor for his position, and the King had little affection for him. It was true that he kept him near his person, but this was only to remove him from external influences.

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[1] "Relation du Cardinal Bentivoglio," Paris, 1642.

It happened that, at the time when Bouillon spoke to him, Henri IV. was confined to his bed by an attack of gout. The ladies of the Court came frequently to visit him, and amongst them was the Duchesse d'Angoulême (Diane de France), who brought with her her niece, Charlotte de Montmorency. While d'Urfé's sentimental romance, "l'Astrée," then at the height of its vogue, was being read to him, the eyes of the Vert-Galant followed this charming young girl, with her slight graceful figure, her regular features and her complexion of lilies and roses. He found her ravishing and resolved to appropriate her for himself.

The first time that he met Mlle. de Montmorency after his recovery from the gout, he said to her :

" You are soon marrying Bassompierre, are you not ? "

Charlotte replied in the affirmative.

" If you feel any repugnance to this marriage," rejoined the King, " confess it to me ; I can help you to break it."

" I have none," replied the girl demurely. " My parents desire it, and I shall obey them."

And the King judged from her manner that the fascinating Bassompierre was a husband only too much to her taste. If she were permitted to marry him, the new and delightful experience of a pure and romantic, but not unrequited, passion, after the manner of the Platonic gallantries of "l'Astrée," which he had been promising himself, would assuredly never be his.

That night Henri IV. sent for Bassompierre, and having made him kneel beside the royal bedside—which appears to have been a habit of the King—he informed him that he intended to marry him to Mlle. d'Aumale and revive the duchy of that name which her father, Claude de Lorraine, had forfeited during the Wars of Religion, in his favour.

"You wish, then, to give me two wives, Sire?" exclaimed the astonished courtier.

"Listen!" rejoined the King. "I wish to talk to you as a friend."

And then, to Bassompierre's consternation, he went on to confess that he was "not only enamoured, but madly and furiously so, of Mlle. de Montmorency." If she became Bassompierre's wife and loved him, he, the King, would hate the happy husband; if she loved the King, her husband would hate the King. In either case there would be enmity between them. He had therefore decided to marry her to the Prince de Condé, who was poor and who cared more for hunting than for women. He would give him a hundred thousand livres a year wherewith to amuse himself, and he hoped to find him tractable. The fair Charlotte he would keep near the Queen's person. "She will be," he added, "the consolation and support of the old age upon which I am about to enter, and I do not wish any other favour from her than her affection, without pretending to anything further."

Bassompierre tells us, in his "Mémoires," that his love for Mlle. de Montmorency was as warm as the chilling prospect of matrimony would allow, while the connection with the House of Montmorency was too flattering and advantageous to be forgone without regret. But he recognized at once that the King was determined and that to attempt any remonstrance would merely involve the loss of the royal favour as well as of his bride. And so, like the supple courtier that he was, he yielded with a good grace, declaring that he rejoiced at such an opportunity of showing his gratitude for the many favours he had received from the King and expressing the hope that this new love would bring his Majesty happiness. But when next he met Charlotte de Montmorency, who, informed of the change that had been made in the disposition of her hand, favoured her too facile lover with a shrug of her shapely shoulders and a glance more eloquent than words, his fortitude gave way, and, in grief and mortification, he hurried to his lodging, where, he assures us, he spent three days without food or sleep. However, he quickly consoled himself:

"The star of Venus is very much in the ascendant over me. In order not to remain idle, I made it up again with three ladies whom I had parted from,[1] one of whom was Marie d'Entragues, whom I met at Madame de Senteny's, and the others by chance without thinking of it, and re-embarked with them."[2]

For a moment it seemed as though Bassompierre had made a vain sacrifice, for Condé, when the match was first proposed to him, declined it. Possibly, a biting *mot* of Madame de Verneuil had been reported to him: "The King intends to humble the heart of *Monsieur le Prince*, and to raise his head;" and the prospect alarmed him. He was a shy, awkward lad, slight of figure and plain of face, with much less experience of women than most young men of his position, and anyone less fitted to be the husband of a precocious coquette like Charlotte de Montmorency, "who had come into the world with all the instincts of gallantry," could hardly be imagined. Finally, however, he suffered himself to be persuaded, and in December 1608, the betrothal took place at the Louvre. The Constable

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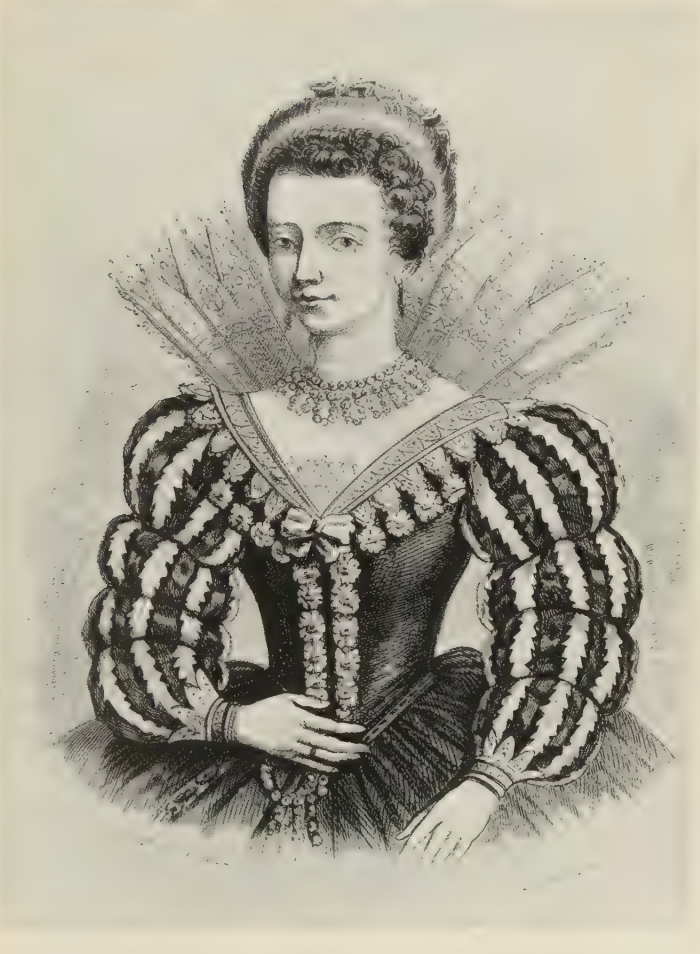
[1] He means at the time of his betrothal to Mlle. de Montmorency, when he was, of course, obliged to free himself, temporarily at any rate, from his entanglements with other ladies.

[2] Bassompierre, "Mémoires."



Charlotte Marguerite de Montmorency, Princesse de Condé.
From an engraving by Barbant.

[*To face p.* 206.

gave his son-in-law 100,000 écus, while Henri IV. granted him an increase of his pension and a *gratification* of 150,000 livres. Charlotte de Montmorency received from the King some magnificent jewels, and 10,000 livres for her trousseau. Owing, however to the necessity of obtaining the Papal dispensation for the marriage of blood relations, and the unusually long delay which this involved, it was not until the following May 17 that the nuptials were celebrated. They took place at the Château of Chantilly, the usual residence of the Constable. Among the few guests was the King's confidential equerry Pluvinel, who had been sent by Henri IV. to bring him the details of the ceremony, including, of course, a minute account of the appearance of the bride. He himself did not feel sufficiently master of himself to be present and remained at Fontainebleau.

However, when, after a honeymoon at *Monsieur le Prince's* Château of Valéry, near Sens, Condé and his bride reappeared at the Court,[1] which was then at Fontainebleau, the enamoured monarch was quite unable to conceal his sentiments. He ardently desired the girl, and he was determined to possess her. His passion was patent to everyone, and excited great merriment at the Court and in Paris. "It was," writes L'Estoile, "the subject of new conversation for the inquisitive and the mischievous, who, without that, spoke only too licentiously of his Majesty and of the villainies and corruptions of his Court." Henri IV., hitherto so plain in his dress and so painfully neglectful of his person, was suddenly transformed; he was now powdered and scented, rivalled the most brilliant gallants of the Court in the richness of his attire and had his beard cut in the latest fashion. The coquettish young princess encouraged the royal infatuation. While exclaiming, with a smile on her lips: "Oh, *mon Dieu*, how foolish the King is!" she secretly received and replied to his love-letters and the passionate sonnets composed for his use by Malherbe and other complaisant rhymesters of the Court, had a portrait of herself surreptitiously painted for him by Ferdinand, the artist who was then the mode, and one night, at his Majesty's request, appeared on the balcony of her apartments with her hair falling loose about her, while from below the Vert-Galant gazed in rapture upon the entrancing spectacle.

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[1] Malherbe, who, presumably at the King's request, had expressed the regrets which the young princess's absence had inspired, now celebrated the joy which her return occasioned:

> "Avecque sa beauté toutes autres arrivent,
> Ces déserts sont jardins de l'un à l'autre bout,
> Tant l'extrême pouvoir des grâces qui la suivent
> Les pénètre partout."

The honour of Condé was soon in grave danger, for, "in the pursuit of this beautiful quarry," the King, if we are to believe L'Estoile, "enlisted the services of everyone, even the bridegroom's mother." "There are thirty *entremetteuses* at work," observed the Queen; "if I mix myself up in the matter, I shall be the thirty-first."

But, to his anger and mortification, Henri IV. presently made the discovery that this time it was not an affair like that of Jacqueline de Beuil and Harlay de Césy. For Condé declined to accept the odious rôle intended for him, and began to surround his wife with all kinds of precautions. Nay, more, after a little while, judging that it would no longer be safe to remain at the Court, he determined to leave it and to take the princess with him. However, when he presented himself before the King to inform him of this decision, he was very badly received, his Majesty, furious at seeing his prey on the point of escaping him, indulging in "threats and insults." The prince replied rather sharply and even spoke of "tyranny." Upon which the King, losing all control of himself, retorted bitterly that he "had never committed an act of tyranny in his life, save when he had caused him (Condé) to be recognized for what he was not, and that, when he wished, he would show him his father in Paris."[1]

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[1] L'Estoile.

"My nephew[1] and your son-in-law," wrote he to the Constable, "has been playing the devil here." And to Sully: "You would be angry, and would be ashamed at what he has said to me. In the end patience will escape me."[2]

On leaving the royal presence, Condé, "having been warned that his mother was being used by the King as a suitable instrument to corrupt his wife," had a stormy interview with that lady, "reproaching her with being utterly shameless, using abusive language to her, calling her *maquerelle* and other names which were no better."[3] He finished by carrying off his wife, whom he conducted on the crupper of his horse to the Château of Valéry, to the great wrath of the King, who spitefully sent instructions to Sully that he was not to pay the quarter of the prince's pension which had just fallen due or to continue to discharge his debts.

Some days later, however, Condé, whether alarmed by these threats or in the hope that the King would recognize the necessity of abandoning the pursuit of his wife, returned to the Court in order to assist at the marriage of the Duc de Vendôme, Henri IV.'s son by Gabrielle d'Estrées, and Mlle. de Mercœur. He brought the princess with him, and the old gallant, interpreting her reappearance as an indication that Condé had changed his mind, believed that he was about to attain the object of his desires. At the wedding festivities his Majesty appeared "all brilliant with pearls and precious stones of inestimable value, with a very rich apparel and accoutred like a lover."[4] But his satisfaction did not last very long, and after another violent altercation, in the course of which "*Monsieur le Prince* was abused by the King, even so far as to be called b—— (according to the common rumour of the Court),"[5] Condé took his wife back to Valéry and thence to Muret, a château situated a short distance from the Flemish frontier.

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[1] Although Henri IV. was accustomed to refer to Condé as his nephew, he was only a nephew *à la mode de Bretagne*, that is to say, a second cousin.

[2] "Lettres-Missives." [3] L'Estoile. [4] Ibid. [5] Ibid.

At the beginning of November, Traigny, governor of Amiens, invited the prince to spend the festival of St. Hubert at his château, near Breteuil. One morning, when Condé had gone hunting, his young wife, under the care of her mother-in-law, went to spend the day at a neighbouring château belonging to a M. de Plainville. As she was passing through the forest, she met a pack of hounds and some huntsmen, and, stopping her coach, called one of the latter to the door and inquired whose hounds they were. The man answered that they belonged to one of the officers of the royal hunting-train, who was about to hunt that part of the forest. At that moment, the princess caught sight of a huntsman with a large patch over one of his eyes, standing on the edge of the road, holding two hounds in leash. He was the King! The princess recognized him and quickly drew back into the coach.

On arriving at M. de Plainville's château, the princess, at the suggestion of her hostess, stepped on to the balcony of the salon, in order to get a better view of the surrounding country, which was very beautiful. There, in the courtyard below, was the same huntsman whom she had seen in the forest. He kissed one hand to her, while he pressed the other to his heart.[1] All in a flutter of excitement, the girl retired, exclaiming imprudently to the dowager Princesse de Condé: "The King is in this house!" That lady, who, if she had at first favoured Henri IV.'s suit, had now apparently changed her tactics, informed her son of the adventure so soon as he returned from the chase.

Condé appears to have lost his head and to have imagined that an attempt would be made to abduct his wife. Anyway, there can be no doubt that from that moment his decision was taken to leave France so soon as possible.

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[1] There are various versions of this adventure. According to "Les Amours du Grand Alcandre," the second apparition of the King took place at the Château de Traigny. Other chroniclers aver that he first appeared in the guise of a falconer, with a hawk upon his wrist. L'Estoile says that His Majesty and his companions were disguised with false beards, and, on the way to Breteuil, mistaken for a band of robbers and pursued by the constabulary; while Tallemant des Réaux asserts that, with the connivance of M. de Traigny, the King hid himself behind a tapestry, through a hole in which he feasted his eyes upon the princess while she was at dinner.

Meantime, in order to lull any suspicions which Henri IV. might entertain, he proceeded, in response to his Majesty's command, to Paris, to be present at the approaching confinement of the Queen. But he left the princess behind him at Breteuil. The King, who had counted confidently upon seeing the fair Charlotte again, was furious, and his disappointment rendered him so intolerable to all about him, that Marie de' Medici sent for Condé and begged him to bring the girl to Court, promising to watch over her, and, if necessary, to keep her in her own chamber. The prince thanked her Majesty, but would give no definite promise.

With Henri IV. the young man had another very unpleasant interview, and meeting Villeroy on the staircase as he was leaving the King's cabinet, he told him that, "rather than consent to his dishonour or expose himself to the anger of the King, he would get himself unmarried." The Minister repeated these words to the King, and the latter, to whom the idea of a divorce appeared a reasonable solution of the difficulty, sent for Condé's secretary Virey and told him to inform his master that, "he was not opposed to the project of which he had spoken." The next day, Virey returned with a letter from the prince, which stated that he was prepared to take advantage of the permission which his Majesty had given him, but stipulated that his wife should remain under his care until the divorce was pronounced.

"It is not the prince who has written this letter," exclaimed the monarch angrily; "it is the work of a lawyer."

And he complained bitterly of the ill treatment which he asserted the princess was suffering at her husband's hands, adding that, if he were still only King of Navarre, he would constitute himself her champion and challenge his nephew to a duel. Other threats followed, and Condé, appearing to waver in his resistance to the royal will, demanded permission to return to Picardy and bring his wife to the Court, a request which was, of course, readily granted.

The evening before his departure, he had an interview with Sully, who pointed out to him that, as First Prince of the Blood, his place was at the Court, that he ought not to leave it without the consent of the King, and that, besides, he had nothing to fear, since the Queen was prepared to take his wife under her protection. From the young man's vague answers and his obvious embarrassment, the Minister judged that he was already resolved to cross the frontier, and, so soon as the prince left him, he proceeded to the Louvre.

"Well," said the King, "you have seen the prince; what is your impression?"

"You have him in your power," was the answer, "and the only advice I have to give your Majesty is to have him put in the Bastille."

"You have always the most extraordinary fancies," rejoined the King impatiently. "What appearance is there that he intends to go away, he who cannot exist without assistance from me? How could he carry away all his Household without my knowing of it and being able to prevent him? Not an hour since, he declared to the Queen that he was quite satisfied with me and that he had no desire to leave the Court, whatever rumour might be going about, and that he would give her his word to that effect."

"As you will, Sire!" observed the Minister. "God grant that I am deceived!"[1]

On November 25, Condé left Paris, ostensibly to fetch his wife. At six o'clock in the evening of the 30th, as Henri IV. was playing cards, Testu, the Captain of the Night Watch, came to inform him that an archer of the Gardes du Corps named Laperrière had just arrived from Picardy with the news that at four o'clock that morning *Monsieur le Prince* had left Muret with his wife, in a coach drawn by six horses, accompanied by two of his gentlemen, Louis d'Aloigny, Marquis de Rochefort, and the Baron de Toiras, his secretary Virey and two of the princess's maids-of-honour, Mlles. de Certeaux and de Château-Vert, and followed by three servants leading saddle-horses for the whole party, and had taken the road to the Netherlands, giving out that they intended to hunt ; that, on arriving at Crécy, they had all left the coach and got to horse, the princess being mounted on the crupper of that of Rochefort, and had then started at full speed for the frontier. Laperrière's father, a gamekeeper in Condé's service, who was acting as their guide, had met him and bidden him ride post to Paris to warn the King.

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[1] "Œconomies royales."

Henri IV. rose from the card-table in great agitation.

" My friend," said he to Bassompierre, " I am lost ! This man has carried away his wife into a wood ; I know not whether it be to kill her or to take her out of France. Take care of my money and continue the game, while I go to ascertain particulars."

He lost no time in summoning his most trusted counsellors, as though for an affair of State, and strode up and down the room—it was the bed-chamber of Marie de' Medici, whose last child, the ill-starred Henrietta Maria, had been born a few days before—with head bent and hands clasped behind him, questioning each one as he arrived. One proposed this and another that, Jeannin being for violent measures ; but the King did not wish to come to any decision until he had consulted Sully. It was not until eleven o'clock that that personage appeared.

" Our man has gone and has taken his wife with him ! " cried the King so soon as he caught sight of him.

" Well, Sire, if you had taken my advice and locked him up in the Bastille, you would know where to find him."

" The thing is done ; it is of no use to talk like that. The question is, what am I to do now ? "

"Let me go back to the Arsenal, sup and sleep upon it, and then I shall perhaps have some good advice to give you."

"No, no! I want your advice at once."

Thereupon the Minister turned away, and, going to the window, stood there drumming on the glass, while the King watched him impatiently. Presently, he stopped and approached the monarch.

"Well, have you thought of something?"

"Yes."

"What then ought we to do?"

"Nothing."

"What! Nothing?"

"Yes, nothing. If you do nothing at all and appear quite indifferent, no one will trouble about *Monsieur le Prince* or help him, and in three months he will be obliged to make his submission. If, on the other hand, you show your disquietude and your anxiety to get him back, he will become a person of importance and be assisted with money. Many will be ready to support him to spite you, who, if you disregard him, will take no notice of him."

Henri IV., however, was in too excited a state to follow this sage counsel. Almost simultaneously, he despatched Testu, the Captain of the Night Watch, and La Chaussée, the exempt of the Gardes du Corps, with orders to follow the prince beyond the frontier and call upon the Flemish authorities to seize his person, and sent orders to Balagny, governor of Marle, and Saint-Chamans, governor of Guise, to arrest the fugitives, if they should attempt to pass through either of those towns. And on the morrow he instructed Praslin, the Captain of the Guards, to proceed as a special envoy to the "Archdukes," who governed the Netherlands,[1] bearing a letter from the King in which Condé was denounced as a traitor and an enemy to the public peace, and their Highnesses were requested to permit his arrest or at least to refuse him an asylum in their dominions.

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[1] The Archduke Albert, brother of the Emperor Rudolf, who had at first been Cardinal of Austria, had renounced the Church in order to marry the Infanta Isabella, daughter of Philip II. Albert and Isabella governed the Netherlands jointly, and contemporaries always speak of them as "the Archdukes."

In the early morning of December 2, Condé and his companions reached Landrecies, continuous rain having made the roads so heavy that they had only been able to make very slow progress. As the princess and her ladies were utterly worn out, he decided to remain there until the next day and then to proceed by easy stages to Breda and place his wife under the protection of his eldest sister, Éléonore de Bourbon, Princess of Orange. But on the morrow, when he wished to continue his journey, he found the gates of the town shut. La Chaussée, who had got on the right track shortly before reaching the frontier, had arrived the previous evening with some of his archers and, exhibiting the orders which he carried to the magistrates—the governor was absent—had called upon them to assist him to arrest the fugitives.

The magistrates, in order to avoid having to give a refusal, answered that they could not take upon themselves such a responsibility in the absence of their governor, but promised not to permit Condé to leave the town until that official returned. But, secretly, they gave him to understand that they would facilitate his departure, and permitted him to send Rochefort to the Archdukes to demand of them an asylum and protection.

The Archdukes, very much embarrassed by this affair, which could not fail to place them in an exceedingly difficult position, not only declined to accord Rochefort an audience, but even refused at first to receive a letter with which his master had entrusted him. Three days passed in conferences and journeys, during which Condé's situation was becoming more and more precarious, for Praslin had arrived at Brussels to demand his surrender of the Archdukes, while La Chaussée had been joined at Landrecies by Testu and Balagny, the governor of Marle, and the town was full of French police and soldiers.

The attitude of their leaders was most threatening, and there seemed every likelihood that, if other means failed, they would have recourse to force.

At length, during the night of December 2–3, Rochefort arrived with a letter from the Archdukes which authorized Charlotte de Montmorency to proceed to Brussels and take up her residence there, with her sister-in-law the Princess of Orange, and directed Condé to leave the Netherlands within three days. The Archdukes hoped in this way to show their deference for Henri IV., while observing the law of nations.

The prince, on the advice of the magistrates of Landrecies, did not delay a moment, and at four o'clock in the morning he and his wife and their attendants mounted their horses and resumed their journey, escorted by some arquebusiers whom the lieutenant of the governor of Landrecies had given them to act as guides. Some leagues from the town, Condé separated from his wife, the latter taking the road to Mons, while the prince followed that which led to Fleurus. Here he remained until the next day, when he proceeded to Namur, and thence by way of Liége and Juliers to the free town of Cologne, where he arrived on December 8 and where the magistrates took him under their protection.

CHAPTER XIV

The Princesse de Condé at Brussels—Embarrassing position of the Archduke Albert—Henri IV. addresses a circular letter to the governors of provinces in which he brings serious accusations against Condé—The attitude of the King invests the flight of the prince with a real political importance—And encourages the Spaniards to support the latter—Letters of Brulart de Berny, the French Ambassador at Brussels, to Henri IV.—Mission of Montmorency-Boutteville to Brussels—Condé summoned thither by the Archdukes—His conversation with Berny—Philip III. offers the prince an asylum in Spain or Italy—Condé, assured of the support of Spain, assumes a rebellious attitude—Montmorency-Boutteville returns to France, and Henri IV. sends the Marquis de Cœuvres to Brussels.

ON her arrival in Brussels, the Princesse de Condé went to the Hôtel de Nassau, the residence of the Princess of Orange. That lady, however, was at Breda and the mansion deserted, save for Kerremans, the Prince of Orange's secretary, and a few servants who had been left in charge, to the great disquietude of the faithful Virey, who had been entrusted by Condé with the task of watching over his wife, and feared that Praslin might take advantage of the circumstances and attempt to carry the young woman off. In point of fact, the Captain of the Guards did contemplate something of the kind, but the return of the Princess of Orange obliged him to renounce his project.

The Archduke Albert was at that moment at his country-house at Marienbourg. In great perplexity at the turn the affair was taking, he applied to his friend and neighbour the Duc d'Arschot for advice; but the only advice that that nobleman could give him was "to arrange matters in such fashion as not to quarrel with the King of France." This, of course, was just what the poor Archduke was endeavouring to do, and he seemed likely to find it no easy matter, for, a day or two later, Brulart de Berny, the French Ambassador at Brussels, waited upon him to support the demands of Praslin, and represented the grave consequences which might follow if he permitted Condé to remain in his dominions. The Archduke replied vaguely that he had received a letter from Condé in which he informed him that he had come with a very small retinue to conduct his wife to the Princess of Orange, his sister, at Breda, and demanding a safe-conduct for his journey, which he had felt unable to refuse him. However, after what his Excellency had just told him, he should not permit the prince to remain longer in his States, though it was too late to prevent him passing through them. And with this answer the Ambassador had to be content.

Praslin had been ordered by Henri IV. to get into touch with Condé, and endeavour to persuade him to return to France and make his submission to the King; but no one appeared to have the least idea where the prince was. However, Praslin had to make some effort to carry out his instructions, and he accordingly made his way to Breda, in the hope that he would find him with his brother-in-law, the Prince of Orange. He was not there. He went on to the Hague, but the prince was not there either. However, he demanded and obtained from the Government of the United Provinces an order that the fugitive should be arrested if found in Dutch territory, which, having regard to the great services which Henri IV. had rendered Holland, it was unable to refuse, but the prince remained invisible. It was believed that he was concealed in a country-house belonging to the Prince of Orange at Buren, which, however, was in neutral territory. Much chagrined at his ill success, Praslin went back to Brussels and thence to Paris, where the King gave him a rather chilly reception.

Henri IV., in fact, was exasperated by the affront which Condé had inflicted upon him by leaving the realm without his permission and removing the young woman whom he so ardently coveted beyond his reach. On

December 17, by a circular letter addressed to the governors of provinces, he declared that he intended to put a stop to the disobedience of his nephew, whom he accused of having fomented troubles in Saintonge, and declared that his flight had been concerted with "the eternal enemy of this realm"—Spain. Both these charges were absolutely untrue. The disorders in Saintonge were only of a local character and were easily suppressed, while, as the Duc d'Aumale points out, the hesitations and embarrassment of the Archdukes would suffice to acquit Condé of the accusation of having conspired with the Court of Madrid.[1]

However, the attitude adopted by Henri IV., the indignation which he had manifested on learning of the flight of Condé, the sending of numerous agents, the angry tone of his despatches, which seemed to indicate that the prince's departure was causing him serious embarrassment, ended, as Sully had foreseen, in investing an event which would otherwise have aroused nothing but a little merriment in the Courts of Europe with a real political importance. The Spanish counsellors of the Archduke blamed him for expelling Condé. To refuse an asylum to so illustrious a fugitive was, said they, contrary to the Castilian idea of honour, and it would be indeed strange if a French political exile of his rank could find no refuge in the dominions of the Catholic King, when political criminals from Spain were welcomed and even protected in France.

The warmest supporter of Condé was Spinola, that extraordinary Genoese, adventurer, merchant and soldier, who had not only commanded the Spanish armies, but spent the greater part of his vast wealth in the service of his adopted country. It was reported—and Henri IV. pretended to believe it—that he had fallen in love with the fair Charlotte, which is not improbable, since the incorrigible coquette appears to have succeeded in turning the heads of all the young gentlemen of the Court of Brussels, who had, of course, lost no time in repairing to the Hôtel de Nassau to pay their respects to the princess. Indeed, such was their enthusiasm that her salon was always crowded with admirers, and Kerremans, the secretary, and the *maître d'hôtel*, who had constituted themselves her guardians, believed themselves obliged to complain to the Archduke.

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[1] "Histoire des Princes de Condé."

"These two men," writes the French Ambassador, Brulart de Berny, to Henri IV., "have induced the Archduke to tell those of his Court that they are not to visit her. They would like to keep her shut up in a box and that no one should see her or speak to her except themselves. They are, in my opinion, the only persons who know where the prince is."

In another despatch the Ambassador informs his Majesty that he and Madame de Berny had taken the princess for a drive in his carriage. "But Kerremans and the *maître d'hôtel* of the Prince of Orange, whose eyes are always upon her, followed immediately at our heels. They prevent my wife from visiting her so often, but that will not restrain her, since I know that Madame finds her visits agreeable, and we do not fail to take her all kinds of little dainties which we see, which please her."[1]

Madame de Berny, in fact, soon became an inseparable companion of the young princess and lost no opportunity of singing the praises of the King and of enlarging upon the triumphs and glories of which she was deprived by her husband's jealousy.

After the return of Praslin to Paris, Henri IV. decided to change his tactics, and despatched Montmorency-Boutteville, father of the misguided gentleman whom Richelieu in after years caused to be shortened by a head for his persistence in fighting duels, to Brussels to visit the princess in the name of her father, the Constable, and her aunt, the Duchesse d'Angoulême. The reception which the Archduke accorded this new mediator was not very encouraging.

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[1] La Ferrière.

"Have you come to fetch the princess?" inquired he brusquely.

"By no means," answered Boutteville, who had been taught his lesson. "I come on behalf of her father and her aunt to console her. . . . The Constable entreats your Highness to consent to keep her with you and not to permit her to go running at random about the world. He reckons also on your benevolent intervention to bring about a reconciliation between his Majesty and the prince, to which end he begs you to send the prince a safe-conduct, in order that he may enter your States. Thus, one might more easily arrive at an understanding, and the King has spoken about it in the same terms to Pecquius, your Ambassador in France."

This language so moderate and so unexpected made an excellent impression upon the Archduke, who appeared disposed to enter into Boutteville's views.

"It is certain," wrote Berny to Puisieux, "that if we had begun by demanding the princess, we should have met with a flat refusal . . . and confirmed them in the opinion which they had formed that we only wanted the wife without troubling about the husband. Your prudence has undeceived them, and gives you the assurance that, in the meantime, she will not be removed from here under any pretext whatever."

Up to that time the Princesse de Condé had not been received at the palace, but the Archduke now sent to inform her that he and the Infanta would be prepared to receive her at four o'clock on the following Sunday. At the hour appointed the princess proceeded to the palace, accompanied by Madame de Berny, who was to present her, and met with a very gracious reception.

"Madame," said the Infanta, "I can only approve of you; a woman ought always to follow her husband."

Two days later, the Archduke came to the Hôtel de Nassau to return the visit of the princess, who received him at the foot of the grand staircase. The ex-cardinal spent two hours with her, but during the whole of that time, we are assured, the good man, fearing to expose himself to temptation, kept his eyes fixed on the ground and did not dare to meet those of the belle. As he was leaving, he had to pass through rooms on the walls of which hung numerous portraits of the ladies of the House of Orange.

"Formerly," said he gallantly, "they were considered pretty women. . . . But to-day who could speak of any other beauty than yours?"

Perhaps, at the bottom of his heart, he absolved Henri IV.

Berny did not wish that Condé should be allowed to come to Brussels, preferring that he should approach no nearer than Louvain or Nivelles, where Boutteville could negotiate with him just as well as in the capital of Brabant. He feared, in fact, the intrigues of Spinola, who, more initiated into the secret views of Spain than the Archduke, would, once Condé was in their hands, very probably use him as a pawn in the political game against Henri IV. For, though the young man's abilities were below mediocrity, he was the First Prince of the Blood and next in succession to the King's children, and as such might prove an asset of considerable value to the implacable enemy of France. To prevent such a possibility, he spoke to the Archduke.

"Would it not be better," said he, "for the Prince de Condé to remain at Louvain or Nivelles, to which M. de Boutteville would go to confer with him?"

"It is too late," was the answer. "The King your master having made known to Pecquius his desire that I should give him a safe-conduct, happy to be agreeable to his Majesty, I sent one immediately, and at any moment the prince may be in Brussels."

Condé, in fact, reached Brussels that same day (December 21). He was received with all the honours which Spanish etiquette prescribed, and Berny, who was on his way to visit the princess, saw a coach standing before the door of the Hôtel de Nassau and the prince, accompanied by Spinola and the Spanish Ambassador, alighting from it.

The following day, Condé was received, first by the Infanta, upon whom he appears to have made a rather unfavourable impression, and afterwards by the Archduke. His reception was distinctly cold, and the prince, who entertained a lofty idea both of his rank and his person, was so much mortified thereby that he departed for Antwerp, under some vague pretexts, and did not return until January 5. That evening there was a ball at the Court, to which he was invited, but he excused himself, though he attended one given by Spinola a few days later. The Italian was generally credited with having fallen in love with the princess—according to some chroniclers, he had conceived for her a passion as violent as that of Henri IV.—and this ball was given far more in honour of the wife than the husband. A banquet preceded it, and the ball-room was decorated with splendid tapestries and lighted by eighty tapers of white wax. But, magnificent though this fête may have seemed to the Bruxellois, Charlotte de Montmorency, who knew the splendours of the Louvre, was but little impressed and regarded it as a paltry affair. She was, besides, much more strictly guarded since the return of her husband, who was acting in accordance with the advice of Spinola. In a conversation which he had with Boutteville before leaving for Antwerp, he had shown himself reasonable, but, now that he had fallen under the influence of Spinola, his tone was altogether different.

"The King," said he to Berny, when the Ambassador came to see him on his return from Antwerp, "exacts, so it appears, that I demand pardon of him; he will embrace me and treat me as in the past. If I do not accede to this, he will summon the Archduke to expel me from this country, and, in the event of his refusal, he will go so far as to declare war on him."

Berny answered that, if the hoped-for reconciliation were not effected, the King might feel himself obliged to demand that the prince should be ordered to leave Flanders. But to declare war was a very grave step, and he might be assured that his Majesty had never contemplated it. The prince rejoined that the Archduke would act only in accordance with the instructions which he might receive from the King of Spain, with whom he had placed himself in communication, upon which the Ambassador observed that the Court of Madrid was always very slow in coming to a decision, and that it might be two or three months before an answer was received. Condé then said that he was prepared to return to France on one condition, namely, that he should be given a place of surety on the frontier.

"If I had not a wife," he added, "I would go to throw myself on the King's neck, but, married as I am, I shall, if the evil still persists, take good care not to return. I shall make use of every means, and, if it is necessary, I shall go to Spain. . . . So long as I have my wife, I shall not be able to act otherwise."

The princess, when informed by Berny of this conversation, did not conceal her distrust of this place of surety for which her husband had stipulated, declaring that it would soon change into a prison, from which she would perhaps never emerge.

The King of Spain's answer which Condé was awaiting arrived about the middle of January. It was couched in vague terms, but a letter from the Spanish Prime Minister, the Duke of Lerma, which accompanied it revealed the real intentions of Philip III. He offered the prince an asylum in Spain or in Italy and a pension suited to his rank. Philip III., happy to be able to intervene in the affairs of France, had at the same time instructed his Ambassador in Paris, Don Inigo de Cardeñas, to inform Henri IV. that he had taken Condé under his protection and desired to serve him as mediator, "believing that otherwise he would fail in the sentiments of friendship and fraternity which united him to France."

Up to that moment the husband alone had been in question ; Condé had invoked only the protection of his honour. But, once assured of the support of Spain, he changed his tone, spoke no longer as an outraged husband, but as a rebel, and astonished and embarrassed Cardinal di Bentivoglio, the Papal Nuncio at Brussels, by avowing to him his treasonable projects and even naming the important persons whom he hoped to associate in his cause. He whose own legitimacy had been so much disputed, now dared to attack that of the children of Marie de' Medici, " with no other intention," observed James I. of England to the French Ambassador at his Court, " than that of some day embroiling the family and royal kindred of his Majesty." [1]

" I believe," wrote the Princess-Dowager of Orange, Louise de Coligny, to the Princesse de la Trémouille, " that *Monsieur le Prince* has lost his senses and that he is abandoned of God. It is heart-breaking to see one who bears the name of Bourbon amongst these people. I am much deceived, or he will be soon tired of them and they of him. I have pity to see him run like that to his ruin and this poor princess shut up at the present moment as in a prison." [2]

Boutteville's mission having failed, thanks to the evil influence which Spinola and the Spanish Ambassador at the Court of the Archdukes exercised over Condé, he returned to France, and, towards the end of January, Henri IV. despatched to Brussels a new envoy, in the person of Annibal d'Estrées, Marquis, and afterwards Maréchal, de Cœuvres, brother of Gabrielle d'Estrées. Cœuvres, who was a great favourite of the monarch, was an energetic, resourceful and none too scrupulous individual, who could be depended on to execute without question any orders with which he might be entrusted. He was a personal friend of Condé and was believed to have considerable influence over him. Villeroy, in announcing this selection to La Boderie, who had been instructed to invite James I. to join Henri IV. in the war against the House of Austria which he was planning and of which we shall presently speak, added :

" The King is inclined to pardon the prince all the faults that he has committed in leaving the kingdom without permission, and also those which he has aggravated by his indiscreet and malicious talk to the prejudice of his Majesty's reputation and by the letters which he has written so rashly to the Pope, the Emperor and the King of Spain to justify his proceedings and to demand safety in their States. If the Spaniards continue to wish to bestow their favours upon him and to support him in his disobedience, the King will not suffer this affront, having the means to avenge himself for it." [1]

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[1] " Ambassades de la Boderie," cited by La Ferrière.

[2] Duc d'Aumale, " Histoire des Princes de Condé."

On February 7, Cœuvres, accompanied by Girard du Tillet, secretary of the Connétable de Montmorency and Berny, presented to the Archduke letters from Montmorency and the Duchesse d'Angoulême. In his, the Constable again begged his Highness not to allow his daughter to leave Brussels without his consent and professed himself very much alarmed at the manner in which she was being treated by his son-in-law. Cœuvres renewed the declaration already made by his master, and added that, if the prince refused to make his submission, the King expected the Archduke to compel him to leave Flanders and to send his wife back to her father. Such pretensions on the part of a monarch who had given asylum to so many rebellious subjects of the King of Spain could not well be sustained ; but Henri IV. asserted that it was on this express condition that Condé had been recalled to Flanders. This the Archduke formally denied, but he renewed his former promise not to allow the princess to leave Brussels and follow her husband, who had already announced his approaching departure.

His Highness's assurance did not seem sufficient for Berny, who feared the secret intentions of Condé. " It is impossible," wrote he to Puisieux, " to trust his words, which change like his thoughts." The Prince of Orange now intervened and proposed that Henri IV. should name some town in Italy or Germany to which Condé might retire and receive the arrears of his pension, but

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[1] " Ambassades de la Boderie."

Cœuvres refused to transmit this proposition to his master, asserting that it would be useless. Nevertheless, on the instructions of the Archdukes, it was laid before the King by Pecquius, the Flemish Ambassador. His Majesty naturally declared that his nephew would receive neither pension nor pardon from him so long as he remained out of France, and he endeavoured to prove that the Archduke had promised the expulsion of the prince if he did not make his submission, and complained of the Spanish agents who encouraged him in his contumacy and furnished him with money. On his side, the Constable came to complain to Pecquius that Condé was ill-treating his wife, saying that he rebuked her because she refused to flatter Spinola, and that one day Rochefort had entered the princess's chamber, where she was with the Princess of Orange, and, drawing a pistol from his pocket, had, to the intense alarm of the poor ladies, fired several shots, declaring that he would deal thus with anyone who might wish evil to his master.

The Duchesse d'Angoulême joined her complaints and lamentations to those of the Constable, and Father Cotton, the King's Jesuit confessor, begged the Ambassador to employ his good offices to compose matters, "for the good of Christianity." There was even some talk of inviting the Pope to intervene in the affair; but while this proposal was under discussion, Henri IV. had recourse to more direct means of arriving at his end.

CHAPTER XV

Project of the Marquis de Cœuvres to carry off the Princesse de Condé—Condé, warned of what is intended, obtains permission for his wife to remove from the Hôtel de Nassau to the palace of the Archdukes—Unsuccessful efforts of the princess to postpone her departure—Cœuvres resolves to carry her off during the preceding night—The enterprise betrayed by the incredible imprudence of Henry IV.—Extraordinary scenes at Brussels—Bitter disappointment of the King—His pathetic letter to the Abbé de Préaux—Ultimatum presented to Condé—Affair of M^{e} Maurissens and the French Ambassador closes the way to conciliation—Condé sets out for Milan to take refuge with the Spaniards—Return of Cœuvres to France—Madame de Verneuil seeks a reconciliation with the King—Her partial restoration to favour—The Princesse de Condé encourages the passion of her royal adorer by her tender letters—Dismissal of her maids-of-honour by the Archdukes—Henri IV. persuades the Constable to demand that his daughter shall be sent back to him—Mission of the Abbé de Préaux to Brussels—Last negotiations.

THE mission of the Marquis de Cœuvres had a secret object and one which, if successful, would serve his master's purpose much more surely and expeditiously than a reconciliation with Condé. He was, as we have mentioned, an energetic and resourceful personage, and, with the assistance of some gentlemen of a like character whom he had brought with him from France, he had conceived the bold project of carrying off the princess and had obtained the King's consent to it.

It was not believed that any resistance on the lady's part was to be anticipated. Ever since her arrival in Brussels, the Ambassador's wife had been skilfully preparing her for some such attempt ; the women of her entourage had been won over by the agents of her royal admirer ; her family even were the King's accomplices. She was, besides, utterly weary of Brussels, where she was obliged to lead the life of a recluse, continually under surveillance, and was in consequence on very bad terms with her husband, to whose jealousy she attributed her misfortunes ; she sighed for Chantilly, for the delights of the Court of France, and was eager at any cost to escape from what appeared to her an intolerable situation.

Through some indiscretion, however, a vague rumour of what was in the wind reached the dowager Princesse de Condé, who wrote to warn her son. Placed thus on his guard, Condé refused to permit his wife to accompany the Princess of Orange on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Notre-Dame du Lac, about half a league from Brussels, which the two ladies were contemplating, and sent emissaries into all the environs of Brussels to ascertain if there were any suspicious Frenchmen on the roads. It is very doubtful whether Cœuvres and his confederates had had any intention of attempting to carry off the princess on the occasion of the pilgrimage in question, but immediately afterwards information reached Spinola and Virey, through the medium of a certain Sieur de Vallotre, a French adventurer whose services Cœuvres had imprudently enlisted, that a veritable *coup de main* was in preparation.

The princess was still living at the Hôtel de Nassau, where her apartments opened on to a garden which was close to the wall of the town. It was proposed to make a breach in the wall large enough to permit the lady to pass through, and, once on the other side of the moat, with the aid of relays of horses, it would be easy to reach La Capelle. The governor of that town, the Marquis de Vardes, with a number of attendants, had just arrived in Brussels, ostensibly on private affairs, but there could be little doubt that his real motive was to assist in the abduction of the princess.

Spinola and Virey lost no time in warning the Archduke, but, fearing that Condé would make a scandal, they only told him a part of what they had learned. However, that was sufficient to throw him into a great state of excitement, and, on the advice of Spinola, he went to the Archduke and obtained from him a promise that, during his absence from Brussels, his wife should reside in the palace, where she would be, of course, much safer than at the Hôtel de Nassau.

The news of this arrangement greatly disconcerted Cœuvres, whose preparations were not yet completed. With the object of gaining time, at his suggestion, the princess's maids-of-honour persuaded their mistress to ask permission to give a ball, which would cause her departure from the Hôtel de Nassau to be postponed for several days. But Spinola perceived the trap and permission was refused.

Cœuvres's only chance now was to hasten matters. The princess was to remove to the palace of the Archdukes on Sunday, February 14; it was resolved to carry her off during the preceding night. With such energy and address did the marquis set to work that, notwithstanding the short time at his disposal, all the arrangements were completed, and, in all probability, the enterprise would have succeeded, had it not been betrayed at the last moment. And, difficult as it may be to believe it, the culprit was none other than Henri IV. himself!

Intoxicated with delight at the prospect of again beholding his inamorata, the old gallant was quite unable to conceal his joyous anticipations, and had the incredible imprudence to confess all to the Queen. Marie de' Medici listened without betraying any surprise or annoyance, but, the moment the King left her, she sent to inform the Nuncio, Cardinal Ubaldini. The Nuncio, in his turn, lost no time in warning Don Inigo de Cardeñas, the Spanish Ambassador, and a courier despatched in all haste by the latter arrived in Brussels on February 13, at eleven o'clock in the morning.

It was Spinola who opened the despatch. He carried it at once to the Archduke and then went to warn Condé, who behaved like a man who had completely lost his head. He rushed off to the Governor of Brussels to demand a guard for the princess, and went about the town heaping abuse upon the King, Berny and Cœuvres and calling upon everyone whom he knew to assist him to protect his wife. The Prince of Orange, when he learned the news, was scarcely less excited; he summoned his friends to arms and wanted to have everyone who was suspected of being concerned in the affair arrested.

Night came—one of the strangest nights which Brussels had seen for many a long year. Cavalry preceded by torch-bearers patrolled the streets; the citizen guard was called out, and five hundred men were drawn up in battle array around the Hôtel de Nassau. The most absurd rumours gained credence: the King of France, it was said, had come with an army to carry off the Princesse de Condé; already he was at the gates of the town.

Cœuvres and Berny were with the princess giving her her final instructions and animating her courage for the ordeal which was before her, when, from the windows of her apartments, they heard the tramp of marching men and saw the armed citizens taking up their positions around the hôtel. They had barely time to effect their escape. However, as they believed that there was no actual proof against them, they resolved to put a bold face upon the matter and to deny everything; and, despite the lateness of the hour, Cœuvres proceeded to the palace and insisted upon an immediate audience of the Archduke, to whom he complained bitterly of the affront which had been offered to his master and of the calumnies spread concerning himself. The Archduke replied that, although he did not believe the rumours which were in circulation, he had felt unable to refuse the guard which Condé had demanded on the plea that an attempt to carry off his wife was about to be made.

"It is an invention of the prince," cried Cœuvres with a fine assumption of indignation and withdrew.

On that same day, Henri IV. left Paris with four coaches "to go to meet his nymph."[1] His disappointment and mortification may be imagined when, on arriving at La Fère, he found not the object of his affections, but a mud-bespattered courier with the news of failure. Nor was he at any pains to disguise his feelings.

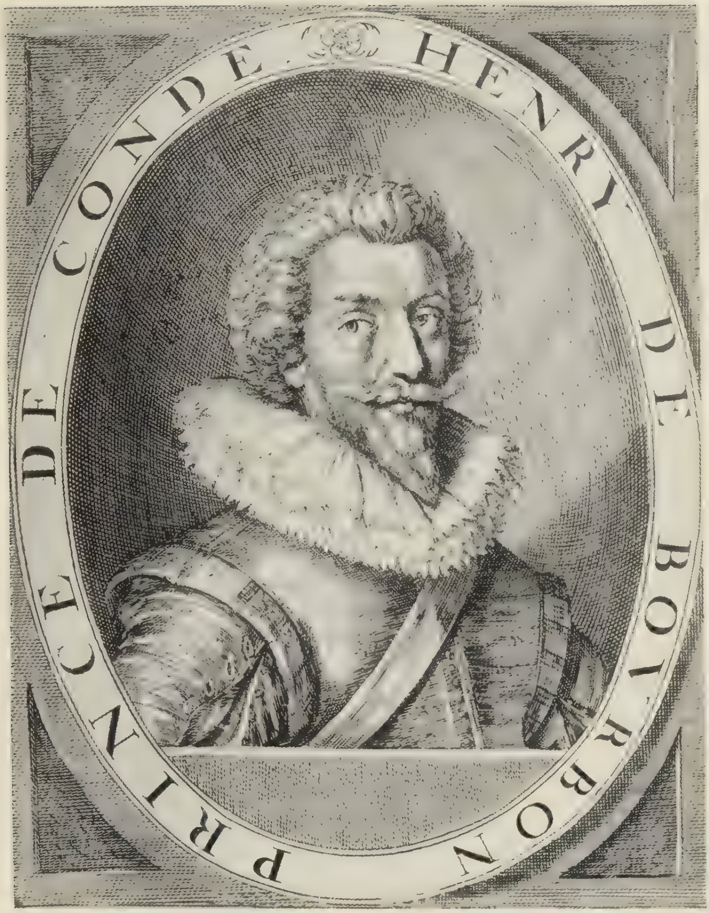
"I am writing to my beautiful angel . . ." he wrote to the Abbé de Préaux at Brussels. "I am so shrunk with my worries that I am nothing but skin and bones. Everything disgusts me. I fly society, and if out of civility I allow myself to be led into any company, my wretchedness is complete."[2]

Meantime, the "beautiful angel" had been conducted under a strong guard to the Archduke's palace "on the pretence," writes Villeroy to La Boderie, "that it was intended to carry her off or make an attempt on the person of the prince." "And you can judge," adds the Minister, "how difficult it would have been to carry her off when she was lodged in the palace of the Prince of Orange and had her husband with her." In the same letter, Villeroy mentions that Spinola had been behaving in the most extravagant manner over this affair, which was attributed to the passion which he had conceived for the princess.

The attempt at abduction having failed, nothing remained for Cœuvres but to discharge the official part of his mission and to return to France. Condé had been going about vowing that he would kill the marquis with his own hand or be killed by him. But he calmed down after a while, and on the 15th, Cœuvres, accompanied by Berny and two of the gentlemen who had come with him to Brussels, the Comte de Longueval and the Abbé de Préaux, proceeded to the Hôtel de Nassau, where he was received by the prince, with whom were Rochefort and Virey. In a conciliatory tone, Cœuvres presented the King's remonstrances and, on behalf of his Majesty, renewed the offer of a full pardon if Condé made his submission. But he added that, in the event

[1] L'Estoile.

[2] Letter of February 20, 1610.


HENRY DE BOVRBON PRINCE DE CONDE

Henri II. de Bourbon, Prince de Condé.
From an engraving by Mathonier.

[*To face p.* 232.

of refusal, he would be declared a rebel and treated as such.

To this ultimatum Condé did not attempt any reply, but promised to let the marquis have his decision in writing with as little delay as possible.

He then applied to a notary, M^e^ Maurissens, who drew up, on his distinguished client's behalf, a long memoir, wherein the prince recalled his old grievances and declared anew that "he would be at the King's orders when he should have the sureties which he required for his honour," and protested in advance against any act of violence, if one had recourse to this means against him.

This document was taken to the French Embassy by M^e^ Maurissens himself, and chance willed it that he entered the court of honour just as Berny arrived in his coach. At sight of the Ambassador, the poor notary would appear to have lost his head, and, throwing the document which he carried into the coach, took to his heels. Berny, furious at such an insult to his dignity, wrenched open the door of his equipage, sprang out and, sword in hand, pursued the notary, and having overtaken him, forced him to return and take back his papers. Then, refusing to listen to his explanations, he ordered his lackeys to throw him into the street, after which he went to complain to the Archduke of this unheard-of proceeding. On his demand, M^e^ Maurissens was arrested, but Condé having represented that he was his legal representative, he was immediately released.

This absurd affair greatly irritated Condé and closed the way to conciliation, and the prince resolved to leave Brussels without delay. He no longer felt himself in safety there, while his situation had been rendered ridiculous by the scandal which the attempted abduction of his wife had created, for few doubted that the young woman had been a consenting party. The Spaniards had offered him an asylum at Madrid, but he had sense enough to see that, if he went to Spain, he would be hopelessly compromised, and had therefore decided upon

Milan as a place of refuge. On February 20, having left his wife under the protection of the Archdukes, who gave him a solemn assurance that she should remain in their care until his return, he left Brussels, in the midst of a heavy snowstorm, secretly, and, the better to disguise his flight, spent two days at a house in the environs which Spinola had made ready for him. On the 22nd, accompanied by Rochefort, the faithful Virey and a Spanish officer of Spinola, he took the road to Germany, and on the 28th crossed the Rhine. After a narrow escape of being arrested by the Venetians, who, as the faithful allies of France, would most certainly have not hesitated to hand Condé over to the sovereign whom he had offended, the little party reached Milan in safety, where the prince was received with every honour by the Count of Fuentes, the Spanish governor of Lombardy. The counsellors of Philip III. at Madrid had, in fact, insisted that Condé should be seriously supported, in the hope of using him to create trouble in France in the highly probable event of a renewal of hostilities with Henri IV.

On his return from Brussels, the Marquis de Cœuvres was no better received by the King than Boutteville had been, his Majesty even going so far as to call him a fool.

"On these occasions," wrote Malherbe to Peiresc, "it is the custom to attribute the unfavourable issue of affairs to those who have negotiated them."

In this hour of disappointment and discouragement, Henri IV. had not even the solace of another love-affair to divert his mind from that which was occasioning him so many mortifications. Overtures which he made to the beautiful young widow of the Duc de Montpensier were received with such icy indifference that he recognized that it would be only waste of time to press his suit. For want of some better distraction, he proposed to spend a day or two with Madame de Moret at her country-house, but that lady begged to be excused the honour of receiving him. Perhaps, she had taken to heart the untimely end of her unfortunate admirer the Comte de Sommerive, for which she was, of course, indirectly responsible; perhaps, she was merely undergoing one of those periodical fits of penitence to which some women of her *métier* are subject. Anyway, she was "entirely given over to devotion," and went about "with ungloved hands and wearing a high-neck gown of black serge."[1]

Charlotte des Essarts, it seems, would have been willing enough to console the lovelorn monarch, and actually made some tentative advances, in the hope of being restored to the favour which she had forfeited. But Henri IV. could not bring himself to forgive her and ignored them.

In her turn, Madame de Verneuil entered the field, and she was more fortunate. This was not the first time that Henriette had sought a reconciliation with the King, who had not now visited her for some months.

At the end of the previous year, while staying at Charonne, she had flattered herself that he would come to see her, but he did not take the trouble to do so. Irritated by such indifference, she gave the following instructions to the little Duc de Verneuil, when she sent him to present the customary New Year's compliments to his royal father: "My son, you will go to the King and kiss his hands very humbly; but you may tell him also that if you were still to make, he would never make you with me."

However, she did not allow herself to be discouraged by this first check, and, on her return to Paris some weeks later, she asked the King for an interview. He replied that he would come to see her, but on the day he had named he excused himself on the plea of illness. Learning that his Majesty proposed to go next day to the Church of Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs to hear the celebrated preacher Father Jacques, she went there also and boldly seated herself next to him.[1]

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[1] Malherbe. The writer adds ironically: "She is not able to persuade many people that she is in good earnest."

"He (the King)," writes Malherbe, "talked much with the marchioness, and, after the sermon, he heard vespers and complines with her, and further, on leaving, gave her an assignation at her mother's lodging, to which they both repaired. It was the recompense for not having visited her for ten months. I know not whether this fire will rekindle; it would be almost desirable; but it is difficult. She says that she is the King's bogey, and her explanation is that ordinarily one inspires little children with fear of the bogey when one is unable to manage them in any other way, and that the King does the same with her; when he wishes to annoy people, he says that he will see the marchioness."

Henriette, in fact, was only a *pis aller*, who might serve also to divert the attention of Marie de' Medici from her husband's preposterous passion for Charlotte de Montmorency, which was beginning to occasion the Queen serious alarm. Nevertheless, this partial restoration to the royal good graces brought substantial advantages to the marchioness, who received, amongst other proofs of the King's favour, a pension of 10,000 écus for her brother, Charles de Balzac d'Entragues, Sieur de Gié, and the Abbey of Saint-Avit, near Châteaudun, in order that she might provide for a certain Sister Jacqueline d'Illiers, a relative of the Entragues.

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[1] It is to be presumed that Madame de Verneuil conducted herself with more propriety now than she did on the occasion of a certain visit to the Church of Saint-Gervais some three years before, in connection with which the old editors of L'Estoile's "Journal" report a curious anecdote: "One day that Father Gontier, Jesuit, preached at Saint-Gervais, the Marquise de Verneuil and the greater part of the ladies of the Court were present at his sermon. These ladies placed themselves near the churchwardens' pew, because the King nearly always sat there. Apart from the noise which they made, the marchioness in particular made signs to the King in order to make him laugh. Father Gontier stopped in the middle of his preaching and turned towards the King. 'Sire,' said he, 'will you never cease to come with a seraglio to hear the Word of God and to create so great a scandal in the church?' All these women, and the marchioness more than the others, omitted nothing to induce the King to make an example of this preacher, but he did not do anything. On the morrow, indeed, he returned to hear Father Gontier and met him as he was going into the pulpit. Instead of complaining of what he had said the previous day, he assured him that he had nothing to fear and thanked him for his corrections; he begged him only not to make them any more in public."

That, in seeking a reconciliation with Henri IV., Madame de Verneuil had entertained the least hope of weaning him from his infatuation for the Princesse de Condé may be doubted. She must have known that such an attempt would be futile, since Charlotte de Montmorency had on her side all the charm of youth and all the attraction of the unknown. Through the medium of Madame de Berny, she had established with the King a secret correspondence, and stimulated the impatience and the passion of her royal lover by her complaints and by the tenderness of her replies to his letters, in which she called him, "her all," "her liberator," "her faithful knight." She hoped to see him intervene personally to bring about her return to France, to the great distress of the Infanta, who dreaded the political consequences of this foolish affair. "I have done all I could," said she to the Papal Nuncio, Cardinal di Bentivoglio, "to detach her from a love which might be called sacrilege."

The Archdukes had very quickly cause to regret having acceded to Condé's request to give his wife shelter under their roof. Scarcely had the lady arrived, when they ascertained that, on the day before that fixed for the abduction, the princess's maids-of-honour, Mlles. de Certeaux and de Château-Vert, had conveyed to the French Embassy their mistress's clothes, which left no doubt that they had been won over by the agents of the King. In the circumstances, their Highnesses felt obliged to dismiss these two damsels from the princess's service and send them back to France. Charlotte de Montmorency complained bitterly of this action and declared that a young woman whom they had given her in place of those dismissed was odious to her. The Archdukes sent away the offending attendant, but they refused to recall the two French women, nor would they accept the maids-of-honour which the Duchesse d'Angoulême proposed to send them from Paris, knowing very well that they would be merely agents of the King. Trying as was the situation, however, the Archdukes appeared determined to keep their word to Condé, in the spirit as well as in the letter.

To snatch the princess from her Brussels prison, one last resource remained to Henri IV: to induce the Constable and her aunt to demand her from the Archdukes. This they finally decided to do, but they took so long in making up their minds that the King grew impatient and wrote to the Abbé de Préaux: "They are colder than the weather; my ardour thaws them so soon as I approach them."[1]

It was the Abbé de Préaux, a counsellor in the Parlement, who had accompanied Cœuvres to Brussels and passed for the principal organiser of the attempted abduction, who was charged to represent the father who claimed his daughter, and he was furnished with letters from the Constable and Madame d'Angoulême, who invoked the approaching coronation of Marie de' Medici, at which the high rank of the princess entailed the duty of assisting.[2] He also brought letters from the King to the Archduke and the Infanta to support these new demands.

Préaux arrived at Brussels on April 24, but it was not until two days later that he was received by the Archduke Albert. He was accompanied to this first audience

[1] "Lettres-Missives." Letter of February 21, 1610. The Constable appears to have been playing a double game, since, while consenting to his sovereign's wishes, he confessed to Pecquius that he preferred to know that his daughter was with the Infanta than in his own house, and told the Spanish Ambassador, Don Inigo de Cardeñas, that her honour was safe if the King of Spain maintained the reputation of his ancestors.

[2] Henri IV., with his usual disregard for decorum, had suggested to the Queen that she herself should write to the Archdukes, and particularly to the Infanta, to press for the return of the princess on the same pretext. This suggestion her Majesty very properly declined to entertain, and her refusal put the King in a very ill humour, which he was unable to conceal.—Letter of Don Inigo de Cardeñas to Philip III. of Spain, March 27, 1610, cited by the Duc d'Aumale.

by Berny and also by the princess, who wished to assist at it to plead her own cause.

In his best forensic manner Préaux recalled the violence to which the princess had been subjected by her husband almost from her wedding-day—it was, he asserted, a matter of notoriety—and the manner in which he had brought her away from France, expatiated upon the injustice of her captivity, and gave the Archduke to understand that the marriage had never been consummated! Finally, he declared that it was the intention of the princess to seek a divorce, and that it was only right that she should be permitted to return to her parents, in order that she might have their advice and assistance in the matter.

In his reply, which had been carefully prepared, the Archduke did not fail to emphasize the fact that he had given his word to Condé not to surrender his wife into any hands but his own. Unless the prince released him from this promise, he must, of course, abide by it. Nevertheless, anticipating the demand which was now being made, he had written to the prince to request that he would authorize him to allow his wife to return to her relatives, and he hoped to have his answer within a fortnight. As for the alleged grievances of the princess, he must really decline to consider them. She had entered his palace of her own free will and with the consent of the Marquis de Cœuvres, and she ought not to leave it without the assent of her husband.

The princess, however, supported Préaux's application, and presented a formal request to the Archdukes to permit her to return to her family, in order that she might be able to prosecute the suit for divorce which she intended to bring against her husband. She added that "she could not be kept against her will without doing great injury to herself and to those to whom she was related, from whom she would seek help, and wherever she might be able to find some alleviation for her wrong."

It was clear that, in this last sentence, she intended to indicate Henri IV., and already, indeed, it looked as if, failing other means to recover his Dulcinea, that monarch would be prepared to resort to force.

On May 2, Berny and Préaux had a second audience of the Archduke, who, to make a semblance of giving some kind of satisfaction to the Constable, proposed that, while awaiting the result of the princess's petition for a divorce, the Pope should be asked to name some place in which she should remain. The Holy Father, he felt sure, would willingly accede to such a request.

Such a proposal was, of course, very far from what Henri IV. desired, and Berny spoke to the Archduke very plainly indeed.

" There is," said he, " nothing to hope for, so long as your Highness will not come to an understanding with those who have been intentionally the cause of the evil, and who, when Condé was in Germany, begged him to come here in order to debauch him, as they have done, and have decided to shut up his wife in the prison in which she is despite her complaints and her protestations, and have, finally, enticed him to Milan to deal with him as they may wish. And now to endeavour to persuade us to send to Rome to obtain the divorce or a sequestration, it is simply ridiculous ! "

Such language, as may be supposed, put an end to all discussion, and from that moment persuasion gave way to threats.

CHAPTER XVI

The "Grand Design" of Henri IV.—An invention of Sully's imagination—Determination of the King to embark in a struggle against the House of Austria when he can do so on advantageous terms—Warlike preparations of France—Question of the succession to the duchies of Clèves and Juliers—High-handed action of the Emperor—Bellicose attitude of Henri IV.—His words bolder than his intentions—Backwardness of his allies—His negotiations with Charles Emmanuel of Savoy—He is undecided as to the expediency of beginning war up to the end of 1609—But by the beginning of the following spring is resolved upon it—Question of whether this decision is affected by the Condé affair—The King prepares openly for war on an extensive scale—Angry interview between him and the Spanish Ambassador, charged by Philip III. to demand the object of these armaments—The belief that if the Princesse de Condé is given up, war may yet be averted is widely held—Henri IV. and his Ministers do everything possible to foster it—Casuistical suggestion of the King's Jesuit confessor, Father Cotton, transmitted to Brussels by the Ambassador of the Archdukes—Conclusion of the Treaty of Brusol between France and Savoy—Probable designs of Henri IV.—His resources and the number and resources of his allies greatly overrated by some historians.

ALTHOUGH since the Peace of Vervins (May 2, 1598), France and Spain had been nominally at peace, with the weapons of intrigue and diplomacy the struggle between the two countries had been carried on with unabated activity and animosity. We have seen how the Court of Madrid had flattered and encouraged the treasonable ambitions of Biron and the Entragues, and, in fact, all who plotted or attempted anything against Henri IV. or his Government did so with the full assurance of Spanish help or of finding, in case of failure, a refuge on Spanish territory.

Henri IV., on his side, was not less assiduous in his efforts to injure the House of Hapsburg, not less careful to encourage its enemies—he did not even forget the Turks—and to prepare by his skilful diplomacy allies for himself in the war upon which he was determined, if a favourable opportunity presented itself, so soon as he had established order in his realm, restored the finances of France and collected sufficient resources for the struggle. And this brings us to the question of what has been called the " Grand Design."

The dominating idea of this project, attributed by Sully to Henri IV. himself, " who would have received the inspiration of it from Heaven," was the total abasement of the House of Austria. The German branch was to be despoiled entirely of its possessions. Some were to be given to Bohemia and Hungary, which were to become elective kingdoms; the rest to Bavaria, Switzerland, Würtemberg, the Marquisate of Baden. The Spanish branch was to be treated more leniently; it was merely to be deprived of its possessions beyond the Pyrenees and confined to the Iberian peninsula, " where it would cease to be formidable and a terror to its neighbours." The Pope would receive the kingdom of Naples with the suzerainty of Sicily. Venice would acquire the islands in the Adriatic, and the Spanish territory in the North of Italy was to be adjudged to the Duke of Savoy, who would become King of Lombardy. The ten provinces of the old Netherlands were to be joined to the seven independent provinces, and to form the Belgian Republic, augmented by the lordships of Clèves, Juliers, Berg, La Marck, Ravenstein and Ravensberg. Brabant, Limbourg and some dependencies of Flanders were to form ten fiefs distributed amongst English nobles, while Hainaut, Artois, the Cambrésis, the Tournésis, the Namurois and Luxembourg formed the appanage of two French nobles. Lastly, the Swiss Republic was to be aggrandized by Spanish Franche-Comté, Alsace and the Austrian Tyrol.

Europe was thus to be divided into fifteen States, or dominations. The Pope, elective chief of a part of Central Italy and of all Southern Italy; an elective Emperor of Germany, who would not be chosen twice in succession from the same family; six hereditary monarchies: France, England, Spain, Sweden, Denmark and Savoy or Lombardy; three elective kingdoms: Bohemia, Hungary and Poland, of which the sovereigns were to be chosen by the Pope, the Emperor and the kings of the six hereditary monarchies; and four republics: the United Provinces, Switzerland, Venice and the Italian Republic, composed of the States of Genoa, Mantua, Modena, Parma, Florence and Lucca.

Differences between the various members of this confederation of States would be regulated by six councils, for Northern Europe, the Empire and former dominions of the House of Hapsburg, Northern Italy, Southern Italy, Switzerland and Western Europe respectively, and from the decision of these councils there was to be an appeal to a General Council. Three religions: Catholicism, Lutheranism and Calvinism, were to enjoy complete freedom of worship. Finally, an army of 60,000 cavalry and 300,000 infantry was to watch over the maintenance of this organisation.

"Modern historians," writes Mr. P. F. Willert, "have shown that the 'Grand Design' attributed to Henri IV. of a Christian Commonwealth composed of fifteen Confederate States, Protestant and Catholic, republican and monarchical, elective and hereditary, was an invention of Sully's vanity and leisure. Such a visionary scheme would not have commended itself to the essentially practical mind of the King, the aim of whose policy, if less ideal and disinterested, was at least more attainable."[1]

Just so! But not a few of these same historians, and Mr. Willert amongst them, while refusing to accept what we may call the League of Nations part of the "Grand Design," continue to believe in Henri IV.'s project of the total abasement of the House of Austria and the remodelling of the map of Europe.

But let us listen to M. Jean Mariéjol, one of the greatest of modern authorities on this period of French history :

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[1] "Henry of Navarre and the Huguenots in France."

"It is sufficient to expose this romance to show the improbability of it. Many historians, however, have adopted it with enthusiasm, and even amongst those who do not admit the 'Grand Design' of Henri IV. there are some who continue to believe in his grand designs. His policy is, however, well known to us. He was up to 1609 more prudent than bold, more practical than adventurous, more attached to immediate results than to distant speculations. In his conversation of October 17, 1609 with Lesdiguierès, Henri IV. promised himself, if he lived another ten years, to marry the Dauphin to the heiress of Lorraine, his eldest daughter to the eldest son of Charles Emmanuel [of Savoy], the conquest of Genoa, and the enthroning in that republic of the Duc d'Anjou, his second son, and perhaps also the marriage of his second daughter Christine to an Infant of Spain, who would be made sovereign of a part of the Netherlands.

"All these desires were not easily realizable in view of the ill-will of the Duke of Lorraine and the opposition of Spain. But they were possible, which the Grand Design was not.

"There is no trace of a project of such *bouleversement* in the archives of Catholic or Protestant powers. Further, to supply the place of documents, Sully has sometimes introduced into authentic papers phrases relating to the Grand Design, and sometimes fabricated entire documents and letters full of this Grand Design. He has even invented an embassy in 1601, to have an opportunity of expounding the ideas of Elizabeth and Henri IV. on the altering of the map of Europe.

"The Surintendant was a man of great imagination, as may be perceived by the inaccuracy of his figures. Protestant Calvinist, he belonged to a party which had long dreamed of revolutions, of changes of dynasty, of wars and of conquests. Already Jean de Ferrières, in the time of Charles IX., had offered the Queen-Mother to make of the Duc d'Anjou a King of England and a sovereign of the Netherlands, of Charles IX. an Emperor of Germany, and of the Duc d'Alençon a King of Naples, or at least a Prince of Genoa. La Noue, more respectful to the established order, had limited himself, in the 'Discours politiques et militaires,' to proposing a plan of crusade against the Turks. But with what care does he set forth the details of the enterprise! He mentions the number of cavalry, infantry, pioneers, galleys, arms, campaigns, marches, battles, necessary to reach Constantinople. Sully, he also calculates with the same care the forces of Henri IV. and of his allies, the cavalry, infantry, cannon, pay of the troops, munitions, provisions. D'Aubigné, another Huguenot, who wrote at the same time as Sully and received his confidences, lends to Henri IV. the project of setting free all the subjects of Spain, of conquering Milan with the aid of the Duke of Savoy and the Venetians, of giving Naples to the Pope, the Netherlands to Maurice of Nassau, the Empire to the Duke of Bavaria, and of sending the fleets of France, Holland and England to the conquest of India.

"To all these Utopias Sully added visions which, in his long old age, the vexation caused by his impotence suggested to him. Since the death of the King his master, he lived in disgrace. He saw the beginning, the middle and might have foreseen the end of the career of Richelieu. He looked on, idle and useless, at the success of a policy directed against the House of Austria. He must then have told himself, and he ended by believing it, that Henri IV., if he had lived, would have done as well, if not better. And he employed all his solicitude, and no scruple, to persuade posterity of it."[1]

But if Henri IV., whose imagination—apart from questions of women—was always tempered by good sense, never entertained the "high and magnificent projects" of which Sully speaks, it is certain that, practically from the time of the Peace of Vervins, he had always kept in view the possibility of one day being in a position to embark on advantageous terms in a struggle against the heirs of Charles V. and that all his policy had been directed towards that end. He had reflected long on the future of his kingdom, and he was imbued with this idea : the necessity of curtailing the power of the House of Austria, though not to the extent which Sully and so many historians have attributed to him. "It was his fixed idea, the old leaven of the Protestant demands ; the ideal of the Huguenots in whose company he had lived so long, and which he preserved as Catholic, as King of France and eldest son of the Church, without perceiving that it was, above all, the war dreamed of by the Protestants which he was proposing to undertake."[1]

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[1] Lavisse, "Histoire de France."

For years past great preparations had been made. Sully, in his dual capacity of Minister of Finance and Grand Master of the Artillery, had accumulated a War Fund which, according to his own account, amounted in January 1610 to no less a sum than 43,000,000 livres, had caused the fortifications of all the frontier fortresses to be repaired, had had more than 300 cannon cast, and had collected vast quantities of munitions and war material of all kinds. France, in short, was fully prepared for hostilities, and all that remained was to await some favourable occasion which might serve to unite a sufficient number of the enemies of the House of Austria to justify her in taking up arms. In the spring of 1609 this occasion seemed to have arrived.

On March 25, 1609, John William, Duke of Clèves, Juliers and Berg, Count of La Marck (on the Ruhr) and of Ravensberg (between the Ems and the Weser), and Lord of Ravenstein, died childless. There were many pretenders to the succession, the nearest heirs being John Sigismund, Elector of Brandenburg, and Wolfgang William, Count Palatine of Neuburg, who claimed through the two elder sisters of the late Duke. But the Emperor maintained that the duchies were male fiefs, which could only descend in the direct male line, while the Saxon princes appealed to old instruments confirmed by the Imperial courts, which secured to them the reversion of the possessions of the House of Clèves.

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[1] M. Charles Merki, "La Marquise de Verneuil."

The question of the succession was then very involved, and what complicated it still more was the importance of the interests at stake. Lying as they did along the Lower Rhine and close to Belgium and Holland, the dominions of the Duke of Clèves, in the hands of a Catholic as John William had been, connected the bishoprics of Münster, Paderborn and Hildesheim with the ecclesiastical electorates and the Spanish Netherlands, thus interrupting the communications of the Protestants of Central Germany with the Dutch. That they should pass into the hands of a Protestant would be a fatal blow to the Catholics of Northern Germany and would threaten the security of the Spanish Netherlands. It seemed probable, however, that the Emperor would take advantage of the contradictory claims to dispose of the succession in favour of one of his friends, or even adjudge it to himself.

In any case, the affair of Clèves and Juliers furnished Henri IV. with the opportunity for which he had long been waiting of taking sides with the Protestant princes of Germany.

The King proceeded to act—or rather to talk—as if the affair were his own. He caused the Archdukes, then on the point of concluding peace with the Dutch, to be informed that, if they sent troops to Clèves, he would insist on the negotiations being broken off and begin war forthwith. The Archduke Albert, desirous of peace, proposed that the Germans should be allowed to fight out their own quarrels. He would not interfere and would also persuade his brother-in-law, Philip III., to remain neutral.

Henri IV. replied that the Archdukes might please themselves, but that whatever happened he was determined to help his friends. On learning that the Emperor had summoned the pretenders to submit their claims to him, he sent Bongars, his principal agent in Germany and a resolute partisan of an anti-Austrian policy, to Berlin to urge the Elector John Sigismund to come to some temporary arrangement with his rivals and unite with them against the House of Austria.

Through the mediation of the Landgrave of Hesse, this was effected, and the Elector of Brandenburg and the Count Palatine of Neuburg were placed in possession of part of the heritage, where they established a provisional administration. But the Emperor declared the fief sequestrated, cited the claimants to appear before him "as lord of fiefs and sovereign judge"; and when the "Possessioners," as they were called, paid no attention to the summons, ordered the Archduke Leopold to take possession of the territory as Imperial Commissioner (July 1609).

The French Government protested loudly against this high-handed proceeding. Henri IV. wrote to Bongars that "he would place on foot a powerful army, which he would exploit in person, if he recognized that it was necessary." He informed Pecquius that he was resolved to support the "Possessioners" against Leopold, and he declared as much to the Count of Hohenzollern, the Imperial Ambassador at his Court.

But his words were bolder than his intentions. Before the end of the summer he was threatening to withdraw from the affair, if timid counsels prevailed at Berlin. Ardent on the field of battle, in politics he was always prudent, and, before contracting any binding engagement, he desired to ascertain the intentions and the resources of the German princes. In August, by the connivance of the commander of the garrison, the Archduke Leopold had obtained possession of the strongly-fortified town of Juliers. Nevertheless, Henri IV. recommended the "Possessioners" to allow the winter to pass without provoking him, since they would not be supported by France until a plan of defence had been concerted with her.

The rest of the year was occupied by negotiations. The German princes showed themselves astonishingly cold over a matter which touched them so closely, and, notwithstanding the efforts of the Elector of Brandenburg, the Evangelical Union—a new confederation of the Protestant princes, formed in 1608, of which Christian of Anhalt was the leading spirit—refused to admit that the affair of Clèves and Juliers was a cause common to all their members.

The fact is that the Protestant princes feared the intervention of the King of France. When he offered soldiers, they demanded money. When he spoke of leading his army in person into Germany, instead of being grateful for such zeal on their behalf, they seemed positively alarmed.[1]

Nor did Henri IV. appear likely to find the assistance he had hoped for in other quarters. James I. and the Dutch were willing to defend the rights of the "Possessioners," but they were certainly not prepared to follow him into a general war against the House of Austria. In Italy, Venice displayed her usual caution; Spanish influence was in the ascendant at the Court of Florence; while the Pope could hardly fail to see that the King's success would mean a serious check to the progress of orthodoxy, and very possibly involve the ruin of the Catholic Church in Germany. In fact, his only certain allies in the peninsula were Mantua—a very little State—and Savoy.

Ever since the Treaty of Lyons, which had terminated the war between France and Savoy, Charles Emmanuel had not ceased to offer his services to the former country and Spain in turn, with the idea of selling himself to whichever was prepared to outbid the other. Latterly, however, he had decided that the hereditary ambition could not be satisfied west of the Alps, and that his interests would best be served by an alliance with Henri IV., when, as the reward of his help in driving the Spaniards out of Northern Italy, he might hope to receive the Duchy of Milan and the title of King of Lombardy.

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[1] Lavisse, "Histoire de France."

For some time Henri IV. had appeared far from anxious for the Duke's friendship. He had consistently refused to entertain the latter's demands for the restoration of the territory ceded to France by the Treaty of Lyons, and had taken the part of the Genevese, when, in the night of December 21–22, 1602, Charles Emmanuel attempted to take their town by escalade. But he had always regarded him as a possible ally against Spain, and when in 1608 the Duke, alarmed at the possibility of a double marriage between the Courts of Paris and Madrid which the Spanish party in France was endeavouring to bring about, demanded for his eldest son, Victor Amadeus, the hand of the King's eldest daughter, he was not refused. On the contrary, he was informed that the proposal should have his Majesty's most careful consideration; and when the affair of Clèves and Juliers obliged Henri IV. to solicit his help, the marriage was decided upon.

Charles Emmanuel was to begin operations, and in September proposed to invade the Milanese with the aid of French troops, while Henri IV. attacked the Imperialists on the Rhine. But the King was not yet ready nor decided upon war, and he instructed Bullion, one of his most trusted counsellors, who had been sent to discuss with the Duke the terms of an alliance, to represent to the latter that "the time to begin the enterprises of war which had been proposed could not yet be fixed," and that it was necessary to assure themselves of the "wishes and resolutions" of the Germans and English.

The King did not demand any territory beyond the Alps, but he considered that he ought to be placed in possession of Savoy after Charles Emmanuel had captured the town and citadel of Milan. Bullion, however, was to be careful not to allow the prince to suppose that this was a condition upon which his Majesty intended to insist, and if he showed himself indisposed to agree to it, to ask for Montmélian and Pinerolo as a security for his good faith.

Henri IV. was preparing for war, but, at the same time, he declared himself a partisan of peace. In mid-October, we find him writing to the Ecclesiastical Electors denying that he intended to bring about an invasion of Clèves and Juliers, while in a letter to his Ambassador at Rome, written at the end of November, his tone is still more pacific.

> "I am of opinion," he says, "that this winter season will suspend the designs and intentions of both parties and possibly furnish means and expedients calculated to moderate the bitterness of parties and cause them to settle matters amicably. To which I shall contribute always, where occasion shall arise, that which depends on my authority, as a prince who is so much devoted to the preservation of the general tranquillity that he readily prefers it to any private interest."

These admirable sentiments are, however, somewhat discounted by another passage in the same letter in which his Majesty declares that, if he perceives that others are not acting with the same frankness as himself, "he will intervene as vigorously as he ever did in favour of his friends and allies."

It is very difficult to decide what were the real intentions of Henri IV. at this moment, but it seems most probable that he did not want war if a peaceable solution could be found. And this not because he cared a jot about "the preservation of the general tranquillity," if he judged the favourable moment for a rupture with the House of Austria had arrived, but because the support which he was likely to receive from those upon whose co-operation he had counted would scarcely justify his resort to arms. Three months later, however, there can be no doubt whatever as to the course which he intended to pursue.

Certain historians, chiefly those who, on principle, are always very diffident in admitting the influence of romantic episodes upon the course of events, or those who, misled by Sully, persist in attributing to Henri IV. designs far more ambitious than those which he appears to have entertained, decline to believe that his policy was in any way influenced by the affair of the Princesse de Condé.

"If Henri IV.," writes the Duc d'Aumale, "found a sort of guilty pleasure in occupying himself with the Princesse de Condé, his policy did not change. That the Netherlands were to be invaded sooner or later, cannot be doubted by anyone who has studied the plan of Henri IV. If he had never loved the Princesse de Condé, the result would have been the same."[1]

Mr. Willert writes in the same strain, but he makes the most significant admission that the episode of the Princesse de Condé "disturbed his (Henri IV.'s) serenity of mind and distracted his judgment at a time when the great enterprise which he had in hand required that he should be in full possession of all the powers of his intellect."[2]

Yes, it distracted his judgment, and to such a degree that one may without excess of imagination believe that it decided him to embark upon a war which up to the end of 1609, as we have just seen, he was certainly very doubtful as to the expediency of beginning.

As spring approached, it became evident that Henri IV. was preparing for war, and that his preparations were far more extensive than was consistent with their avowed object, the expulsion of the Archduke Leopold from Juliers. In Paris and in all the large towns the utmost activity prevailed and every road in France was covered with troops, guns and military stores moving towards the frontier.

On April 1, Don Inigo de Cardeñas demanded an audience of the King to inquire into the object of his armaments and warlike preparations. If, said he, they were directed against the Netherlands, his master considered the interests of his sister his own. Henri tartly replied that his Catholic Majesty's solicitude for one so near him in blood was greatly to be commended, but that it was a pity that he had so much superfluous charity left to bestow on other people's relatives. If such a rebel as Condé had fled from Spain into France, he would, not only have refused him an asylum in his dominions, but have delivered him up. Then he went on to complain of the part played by Spain in the conspiracies of Biron and of the Entragues and in every matter where there was a possibility of doing him an injury. As for the Archdukes, it was true that they had at first appeared willing to act the part of friendly neighbours, but they had changed their tone, nor could it be doubted that this was due to orders received from the Escurial. Don Inigo retorted that Henri had helped the Dutch and shown his ill-will to Spain in many ways, and asked categorically whether it was against the King his master that the powerful forces now assembling were directed.

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[1] Duc d'Aumale, "Histoire des Princes de Condé."

[2] "Henry of Navarre and the Huguenots in France."

"I arm myself and my country," replied the Béarnais, "to protect myself, and I have taken my sword in hand to strike those who shall give me cause."

"What then shall I tell my master?"

"Whatever you please."[1]

A few days later, the King declared to the Nuncio Ubaldini that the "displeasures" which the Archdukes and the King of Spain were causing him obliged him to raise a Royal army of thirty thousand men. As

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[1] Don Inigo de Cardeñas would appear to have been decidedly credulous for an Ambassador, particularly a Spanish one, and to have swallowed greedily all kinds of rumours, some of which were probably spread for his particular benefit. In his conversations and despatches he declares that "every day one expects to see the King march on Brussels with a body of cavalry," that the Kingdom of France is subverted by his Majesty's infatuation; that the Huguenots are about to rise; that the Queen has decided to place herself at the head of the malcontents. He shows Henri IV. almost as a madman, ready to risk his crown to gratify a senile passion; deprived of reason and sleep, calling for his inamorata in the night, and spending whole days in talking about her with a *maître-d'hôtel* who had just quitted Condé's service.

Spain, after his accusations and menaces, would most certainly take sides with the Emperor, even if she were not herself directly attacked, few doubted that it was a general war which was preparing.

The belief that the Princesse de Condé was the principal cause of the bellicose attitude of France and that war might yet be averted if she were given up, was widely held, and Henri IV. and his Ministers did everything possible to foster it. On April 14, Jeannin told Pecquius that "if the matter of the said princess were attended to, that would perhaps be to extract the largest thorn which was causing the evil and to afford a means to accommodate everything." A few days later, Villeroy admitted to the Ambassador that, on his master's side, "there was passion, and that if they were prepared to remedy the matter of the princess, there would be means to accommodate and appease all the rest; but, in case the princess remained where she was, they were on the eve of a rupture which might set fire to the four corners of Christendom."[1] Finally, on April 28, Henri IV. declared cynically to the Nuncio that if the Archdukes and the Catholic King showed their friendship for him, by sending the Princesse de Condé back to her father, the affairs of Juliers might be accommodated, and that, in any case, if it were necessary to send troops, four thousand men would suffice there.[2] At the same

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[1] Letters of Pecquius to the Archduke Albert, cited by the Duc d'Aumale, "Histoire des Princes de Condé," Vol. II.

[2] Letter of Pecquius to the Archduke, April 28, 1610, cited by the Duc d'Aumale. L'Estoile, under date April 30, reports a conversation between Henri IV. and the Nuncio, which we give with all due reserve:

"The Nuncio of the Pope having come to visit his Majesty, the King demanded of him what news he had from Rome, what was being said about war and what opinions he received from Italy. The Nuncio replied that everyone was astonished at the great preparations which he (the King) was making, and that by his armaments he had spread alarm and terror throughout all Europe, although no one knew what he intended to do. 'But,' said the King, 'where do they think that I intend to strike? I pray you tell me freely what opinion they have there.' 'Sire,' replied the Nuncio, 'they know nothing about it, and opinions are so different that to learn anything it must needs come from your Majesty.' 'I know that well,' said the King, 'but still, tell me the opinions of those who are recognized as the most capable of reasoning about it.' To which the time, he told his Jesuit confessor, Father Cotton, that he would make war to recover the princess.[1] The new Helen, as Pecquius called her, was threatening to provoke another Trojan War.

The object of all this talk was, of course, to induce the Archdukes to send the Princesse de Condé back; but it is equally certain that, even if they had consented to this, it would have had no effect upon Henri IV.'s plans. Had they been willing to surrender her some weeks earlier, before the retention of his inamorata at Brussels and the protection afforded to her husband by the Spaniards at Milan had combined to exasperate the King against Spain, it is quite possible that the question of the succession in Clèves and Juliers might have been accommodated and the pretext for war thus removed. But in April it was too late; Henri IV. had gone too far to draw back.[2]

Nuncio had no desire to reply, but in the end was so much pressed by his Majesty that he said that the most intelligent were of opinion that the principal object of his armaments was *Madame la Princesse*, his cousin. To which the King, agitated and angry, replied by swearing not his '*Ventre-Saint-Gris!*' but a '*Mordieu!*' saying that he truly intended to get her back and that he would have her; that no one should prevent him from doing it, not even the Lieutenant of God Himself; that her father was one of his old and faithful servants, and had demanded it of him on bended knee with tears in his eyes, begging him to consent to restore her to him. And this he had promised and would do, and no one save He who is above should be able to prevent him. . . ."

[1] The Jesuit, who was quite prepared to resign himself to seeing his royal penitent become the lover of the Princesse de Condé, if only he could prevent the threatened attack upon the House of Austria, the champions of orthodoxy, insinuated to Pecquius that "their Highnesses might, in all security of conscience, not send back, but *permit to escape*, her whom they had promised to retain." The Ambassador duly transmitted this casuistical suggestion to the Archdukes, who, however, declined to entertain it.

[2] It may be mentioned that on May 10, 1610, that is to say, four days before his death, the King finally abandoned the attempt to intimidate the Archdukes into purchasing security by a compliance inconsistent with their honour and, at the same time, revealed that all the threats of marching upon Brussels had been mere bluff, by asking in the most friendly terms the Archduke Albert's permission to lead his army across Luxembourg to the Rhine. This permission was granted by the Archduke, notwithstanding the opposition of Spinola and the Spanish party in his

If, at the end of the previous year, Henri IV. had doubted the expediency of beginning war, he ought to have doubted it still more now, since it was evident that he could expect comparatively little effective co-operation, except from Charles Emmanuel of Savoy, a slippery personage who was quite capable of deserting his ally if it suited his interests.

The King had endeavoured to persuade the German princes that he was arming in their interests. But the Catholics refused to be convinced of his devotion to German liberties. The Duke of Bavaria repulsed his overtures ; the Electors of Cologne, Trier and Mainz sent troops to the assistance of the Archduke Leopold. In July 1609, indeed, a Holy Catholic League had been formed by the Duke of Bavaria and the Bishops of Würtzburg, Passau and Augsburg and the three ecclesiastical electors ; and there was even a rumour of a greater league still which was to be joined by the King of Spain and the Pope.

The Protestants were divided, and the most powerful of the Lutheran princes, Christian IV. of Saxony, was on the side of the Emperor. Some of the members of the Evangelical Union were far from anxious for war, and it was only the fact that the Catholics were combining against them and that they might have need of the help of the King of France that decided them to unite with him to settle the succession to Clèves and Juliers. By the Treaty of Hall (February 11, 1610), which, after a good deal of difficulty, Henri IV.'s ambassador, Boissise, succeeded in concluding with them, they engaged to send 10,000 men to the assistance of the Elector of Brandenburg and the Count of Neuburg. If, on account of the aid which France was to render the "Possessioners," she was attacked by the Spaniards, the Union would assist her with 4,000 infantry

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Council, the fact being that his Highness's resources had been so exhausted by the recent war against the Dutch that it was quite impossible for him to raise an army capable of offering any effective resistance to the French. The courier he despatched did not, however, reach Paris until after Henri IV.'s death.

and 1,000 cavalry, provided, however, that there was no longer open war in the country of Juliers and its dependencies or in their own States. They consented on the King's demand not to conclude a separate peace, but this promise was accompanied by reservations which rendered it of very doubtful value. In short, the negotiations showed only too plainly that the Protestant princes had but little stomach for the business and that once the Archduke Leopold had been expelled from Juliers, it would be impossible to count on further help from them.

England agreed to furnish 4,000 men and the Dutch a similar number. The latter, who were to be commanded by Sir Edward Cecil, were to be taken from the English and Scottish regiments in the pay of the United Provinces and to return to their old service at the termination of hostilities. But it was most plainly stipulated by both England and Holland that their contingents were to be employed to support the "Possessioners," and for no other purpose.

Henri IV. had endeavoured to draw James I. into a defensive league with him and had written him letters denouncing the pretensions of the House of Austria to universal monarchy, which, having regard to the incapacity of Philip III. and Rudolf II., must have sounded a trifle absurd. But the cautious Scotsman declined to bind himself by a treaty of reciprocal guarantees and, after many disguised refusals, ended by informing La Boderie that he saw no reason to break with Spain and the Archdukes.[1]

Nor did the King succeed any better with the Dutch, notwithstanding all the obligations under which he had placed them. When he demanded that they should attack the Netherlands, they excused themselves from breaking the peace concluded with Spain in the spring of 1609.

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[1] James I., it may be mentioned, strongly disapproved of his brother of France's passion for the Princesse de Condé, and declared that "it was not love but villainy to wish to debauch the wife of another."

The Pope was making every effort to maintain the peace between the great Catholic Powers, but, in the event of war, there could be no doubt that his sympathies would be with the Emperor, Spain and the Catholic League against the Protestant claimants to the succession in Clèves and Henri IV., their ally. It would even appear that his Holiness gave the Ambassadors of the Catholic princes to understand that he would be prepared to assist them with money.

The bait of a part of the Milanese in return for their help was vainly dangled before the Venetians, who declared their intention of remaining neutral.

Henri IV. had but two allies in Italy: Mantua and Savoy. The marriage between the King's eldest daughter, Élisabeth, and Victor Amadeus, Prince of Piedmont, the heir of Charles Emmanuel, had been decided upon in November 1609, and nothing now remained but to settle the conditions of the alliance between the two sovereigns. Up to that time, the Duke of Savoy had shown himself by far the more anxious to conclude the treaty and commence hostilities, and in January 1610, he offered, if Henri IV., who was still hesitating, were willing to declare war, to surrender to him Nice and Montmélian as places of surety. But when he saw the King absolutely determined to avenge on Clèves the refusal of Brussels, the astute prince promptly changed his attitude, and, to Henri IV.'s chagrin, seemed inclined to draw back. Thanks to this adroit move, he was able to make his own terms.

In the instructions which Henri IV. sent to Bullion, at the end of March 1610, he no longer ventures to speak of the cession of Savoy after the conquest of Lombardy; he will be content with the surrender of Montmélian and the right to occupy the town and fortress of Pinerolo for the duration of the war. But Charles Emmanuel refused to surrender anything, temporarily or not, and demanded that the marriage of the Prince of Piedmont with Élisabeth of France should be celebrated without delay and the bride sent to the Court of Savoy. To this Henri IV. objected, on the pretext of the little princess's youth and health, being unwilling to give his daughter to the son until the father had definitely committed himself to the side of France. Finally, however, all difficulties were removed, and on April 25, 1610, at Brusol, near Suza, the two sovereigns concluded an offensive and defensive alliance " for the liberty of the Church and Italy and against the encroachments of Spain."

The conditions of the Treaty of Brusol were practically all that Charles Emmanuel had desired. Henri IV., who, in the previous autumn, had hoped to induce the Duke to cede to him the whole of Savoy, had to be satisfied with the demolition of the ramparts of Montmélian, and, in lieu of Pinerolo, which he had demanded as a pledge of his ally's good faith before permitting his troops to cross the Alps, he, ignoring the old proverb about the bird in the hand, accepted two of the places which it was hoped to take from the Spaniards, preferably Valenza and Alessandria. An army of 14,000 men under the command of Lesdiguières was to co-operate with the forces of Charles Emmanuel in the invasion of the Milanese, and hostilities were to begin in both Germany and Italy the following month. The marriage contract of Victor Amadeus and Élisabeth of France was to be signed on June 25.

At the beginning of May, Henry IV. had two armies fully mobilized for war, while a third was in process of formation. The Army of Champagne, consisting of 30,000 infantry and 6,000 cavalry, which the King intended to lead in person against the Archduke Leopold, was encamped around Châlons, with its advance guard at Mézières ; that of Dauphiné, which numbered 14,000 and was under the command of Lesdiguières, was to co-operate with Charles Emmanuel, as we have just stated, and that of the Pyrenees, commanded by the Marquis de la Force. This last army, which would consist of some 10,000 men, was to cross the mountains and assist the Moriscos of Aragon and Catalonia—the half-converted descendants of the Spanish Moors—whom the fanatical and short-sighted Government of Philip III. were endeavouring to expel. It was hoped that the Spanish nobility, who were protesting loudly against the persecution of their vassals, would, if they did not help, at least not resist, the invaders, and that this diversion would prevent Philip III. from sending reinforcements to Italy and assisting his Austrian cousins.

What Henri IV. contemplated, after the expulsion of the Archduke Leopold from Juliers had placed him in a position from which he would have been able to threaten the Netherlands and the Catholic States of Germany, is uncertain. But it is probable that he intended to invade the Netherlands, secure Lorraine by the marriage of the Dauphin to the Duke's eldest daughter—an alliance which the Court of Nancy would no longer venture to oppose—and drive the Spaniards out of Franche-Comté. He could, however, have well dispensed with any territorial acquisitions if he had been able to curtail the power of the House of Austria. If he had succeeded in establishing a strong barrier on the Lower Rhine between the Spanish Netherlands and the Catholic States, and had placed the Milanese in the hands of the Duke of Savoy, he would have isolated Spain from Austria and Austria from the Netherlands. Thus, the links which bound together the unwieldy fabric of the empire of Charles V. would have been broken, as many years later they were broken by Richelieu. But would he have succeeded in doing this? Would he, indeed, have derived any advantage from the war comparable with the sacrifices which it must have entailed? It is very doubtful, and those historians who, misled by Sully, appear to regard his success as something like a foregone conclusion, have, for the most part, grossly overrated his resources and the number and resources of his allies.[1] The campaign in Juliers concluded, the English and Dutch contingents would have been withdrawn, and very probably, as we have seen, the troops of the Evangelical Union as well; at any rate, they would certainly not have supported him in a war of conquest. He would then have been obliged to depend on his own unaided efforts on this side of the Alps. Without doubt, he would have carried all before him at first, because he was ready for war while the Spaniards and the Imperialists were not, and the former had the struggle with the Moriscos on their hands. But the resources of both branches of the House of Austria were very considerable, and Spain, though always slow in getting under way, was a terribly tenacious antagonist, and "her army was still the army of Pedro Navarro and of Gonsalvo of Cordova, of Alva and Farnese, still the most perfect instrument of war in Europe, surpassing other troops in organisation, professional pride and discipline."[1] From 1595 to 1598 Henri IV. had had no advantage over her, although at that time she was without allies and was obliged to defend herself both on land and sea against England and Holland. Was he likely to succeed any better when she was allied with the Empire? All things considered, it is impossible to resist the conclusion that the Cardinal de Richelieu is right when he says in his "Mémoires": "Whoever will consider the enterprise upon which he (Henri IV.) embarked at the end of his life will not doubt of the bandage which he had over his eyes."

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[1] For instance, the Comte de la Ferrière, usually so well informed, gives the King for allies, besides England, Holland and the German Protestant Princes, Sweden, Denmark, Venice, Tuscany and even the Papacy, and says that the forces of this coalition amounted to 280,000 men and 200 cannon.

All the beneficial results of his reign, in fact, were about to be compromised, because he had allowed his usually sane judgment to be perverted by his exasperation at the part which Spain had played in the miserable Condé affair.

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[1] Willert.

CHAPTER XVII

Unpopularity of the approaching war—The Ultramontane clergy, and particularly the Jesuits, foment the discontent of the more ardent Catholics—Violent sermons and extravagant rumours—Henri IV. and the Jesuit—Summary of the plots against the King's life from the beginning of his reign—François Ravaillac—His early life—His hallucinations—He is convinced that Henri IV. intends to make war on the Pope—His vain endeavours to obtain an audience of his Majesty, in the hope of persuading him to renounce such intentions and to banish or forcibly convert the Huguenots—He finally resolves to kill the King.

THE armaments of Henri IV. were costing him very dear. In April, he admitted to the Nuncio that he had already expended between 500,000 and 600,000 écus, and his troops were not yet all mobilized nor the campaign begun. To meet the heavy expenditure entailed by these military preparations, he was obliged to have recourse to the creation and sale of a great number of new offices and the imposition of additional taxes. L'Estoile complains that all the financial edicts of the late King (Henri III.), who had created so many, had been revived, " with a batch of new ones, much more pernicious and oppressive."

The war heralded by such heavy taxation was not popular, and the cause still less. The spirit of the League was not dead. At the Court there was a party, of which the Nuncio Ubaldini was the soul, which sought to demonstrate the advantages of Catholic over Protestant alliances, and laboured to bring about a *rapprochement* with Austria and Spain. Amongst the middle and lower classes, the more ardent Catholics were indignant that the King should be about to go to war in order to sustain abroad the co-religionists of the Huguenots.

The Ultramontane section of the clergy, and the Jesuits in particular, lost no opportunity of fomenting this discontent. The Advent sermons (December 1609) were very violent. The celebrated Jesuit, Father Gontier, who preached before the King on Christmas Day and the following Sunday, stigmatized the Huguenots as "vermin and *canaille*" whom the Catholics ought not to suffer amongst them. He referred to the article of their confession which identified the Pope with Antichrist, and, turning towards the King, continued: "If it is thus, Sire, as they wish to make people believe, that the Pope be Antichrist, what will be the value of your marriage, Sire, which took place in virtue of a dispensation? What will become of M. le Dauphin?" A rumour was circulated amongst the people that at Christmas the Huguenots had planned a St. Bartholomew of the Catholics, and that, when the plot was detected, the King, still a Huguenot himself at heart, would not allow the guilty to be punished.

As time went on, and it was recognized that Henri IV. was resolved on war, the sermons grew more violent, the rumours more extravagant. It was said that the King was about to attack the Pope and bring him in chains to Paris, and to help the German heretics to root out the orthodox remnant in the Empire. Why else, it was asked, were Huguenots like Lesdiguières, Bouillon, La Force and Rohan placed in command of his armies?

These were the methods by which the Day of the Barricades and the assassination of the late King had been brought about, yet Henri IV. treated such direct incentives to sedition—and worse[1]—with a leniency which, in the circumstances, was inexcusable. Meeting one day a Jesuit who had preached in his presence with the utmost violence against heretics and their no less guilty protectors, who, he protested, ought not to be permitted to live, the King said :

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[1] The Ultramontanes taught that the Pope when he spoke as Christ's Vicar was the supreme and infallible head of the Church, and that an excommunicated sovereign was a tyrant, to whom his subjects not only owed no allegiance, but whom any might lawfully slay. Well, Henri IV. had long since received the Papal absolution. But if he governed contrary to the interests of the Church, if he protected heretics at home, and, in alliance with them, made war on the faithful abroad, if he were even meditating, as some of them did not scruple to assert, war upon the Holy Father himself, might he not be regarded as a "tyrant" and treated as such without waiting for any Bull of excommunication from Rome? The late King

" Well, Father, won't you pray to God for us ? "

" How can we pray to God for you, Sire," was the answer, " when you are going into a heretic country to exterminate the handful of Catholics left ? "

Instead of being angry, the King turned away and laughingly remarked :

" Zeal has turned the good Father's head."

It was zeal such as this that placed the knife in Ravaillac's hand !

From the beginning of Henri IV.'s reign, the plots against his life had been numerous, as generally happens when a considerable part of the nation is opposed to the Government. " The list of projects, of attempts at assassination," observes M. Merki, " if it were published, would be rather long, and would make us understand what, despite his efforts at conciliation, was the extent of the hostility of the former Leaguers, of the Spaniards, of the monks ; notwithstanding the parade of his Catholicism, which always remained suspect." It is not improbable that, for different reasons, some of those which were nipped in the bud were never disclosed, but the majority have been reported by the chroniclers of the time and enable us to comprehend with what animosity and persistency, through long years, assassination dogged the footsteps of the Béarnais, until at last it claimed its victim, at the moment when he was about to begin a war in which the greater part of Europe might have been involved.

In May 1591, a young man named Pierre Barrière,

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had not been excommunicated by the Pope, but he had caused a Prince of the Church to be foully done to death and had allied himself with the Huguenots against his Catholic subjects of the League ; and the Spanish Jesuit Mariana, in his notorious work, " De Rege et Regis Institutione," had declared " that in the opinion of many, and certainly in his, Jacques Clément, in assassinating Henri III., had acquired an immortal glory."

incited by a Jesuit of Lyons named Vardes, and two parish priests of Paris,[1] and "not unwilling to lay down for the faithful a life which disappointed love had rendered worthless to himself," joined the Royal army at Senlis, with the object of watching for an opportunity of assassinating the King. Happily, an Italian Dominican, to whom the plot had become known, sent to warn Henri IV. of his danger, and Barrière was arrested, brought to trial and broken on the wheel.

On November 27, 1594, after the King, on his return from a journey, had entered the house of Gabrielle d'Estrées in Paris, a young man, who had slipped in unperceived amongst the crowd of courtiers, rushed forward and struck at him with a knife. The blow might have been fatal, if at the very same moment Henri had not stooped to raise two gentlemen who had been presented to him and were kneeling, according to custom, to clasp his knees. As it was, his upper lip was cut through and his mouth injured. The would-be regicide proved to be one Jean Chastel, a pupil of the Jesuits. He was a depraved youth of feeble intellect, which had been further weakened by the severity of the discipline and the threats of damnation by which the Fathers had endeavoured to bring him to repentance. This they had done so effectually that eventually he had resolved to exchange the pains of hell for the crown of martyrdom, by delivering his church and country from an excommunicated "tyrant." Jean Chastel suffered the barbarous punishment reserved for regicides, his Jesuit tutor was hanged and his body burned, and the Jesuits banished from Paris and the kingdom.[2]

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[1] The curé of Saint-André-des-Ars and his vicar. Some writers assert that the Rector of the Jesuits was also implicated, which is highly probable. Anyway, when he left Paris in the train of the Legate after its surrender to Henri IV., one of the guilty priests accompanied him.

[2] "On Saturday, the 7th (January, 1595)," writes L'Estoile, "a Jesuit named Guignard, master in the college of Paris, learned man, aged thirty-five years or thereabouts, was, by decree of the Parlement, hanged and strangled in the Place de Grève, and his body burned to cinders, after he had made *amende honorable* in his shirt before the Church of Notre-Dame. Arrived at the place of execution, he declared that he

It was not until the end of 1603 that they were permitted to return, despite the protests of Sully and the Parlement.

The terrible fate of Jean Chastel was far from discouraging others. At the beginning of the following year, the King was warned that a soldier of the Brussels garrison, named Châteaufort, had come to Paris for the purpose of assassinating him. This man was described as having a bloodshot eye, in consequence of which a number of persons with bloodshot eyes were arrested, without, however, Châteaufort being discovered.

The threats of the vicar of Saint-Nicolas-des-Champs, who, when in his cups, brandished a knife and boasted that "he intended to deal a blow like that of Saint-Clément" (Jacques Clément), ought not, perhaps, to be taken very seriously, although the matter ended seriously enough for the ecclesiastic in question. But the robber chief Merleau, who was executed a few weeks later, was certainly capable of regicide or any other crime, and there can be little doubt about the guilt of Jean Gaudon, the advocate of Angers, hanged in February 1596, and none whatever about that of the Spaniard who was broken on the wheel the previous month.

In the following September, an Italian, "who had been suborned to slay his Majesty with a new-fashioned arbalest,"[1] was arrested at Meaux. Although Henri IV. was the least vindictive of men, he must have felt considerable satisfaction when this scoundrel was sent to the gibbet, since he had recognized in him a man who, during his campaign in Franche-Comté the previous year,

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died innocent and that the Jesuits had never either procured or approved the death of any king whatever."

The latter part of Father Guignard's dying declaration was, of course, very far from true, but, since the Jesuits were well aware that an attempt to assassinate the King would be certain to entail their banishment, which was even then being discussed, he and his colleagues must be absolved from the charge of having directly incited Jean Chastel. Nevertheless, as Mr. Willert very rightly remarks in this connection, "they who excuse and glorify crime cannot refuse responsibility for the fruits of their doctrine."

[1] L'Estoile.

had given him false information which had caused him to lose 120 horse, who fell into an ambush.

The fact that the King had been received into the fold of the Church and granted absolution by the Pope would not appear to have abated the fanatical hatred with which he was regarded by a section of the regular clergy, since on April 3, 1599, three monks, two Jacobins and a Capuchin, were hanged in Paris, for having plotted the death of his Majesty.[1] On the other hand, it was a Capuchin of Milan, one Father Honorio, who, a few weeks later, sent the King warning that a certain "worthless scoundrel" had just quitted that city for Paris with the intention of making an attempt upon his person. All the inns and taverns of Paris were ransacked for this individual, who was eventually laid by the heels and thrown into prison, after which we hear no more of him. Presumably, there was insufficient evidence to justify his being brought to trial.

In the spring of 1600, occurred the strange case of Nicole Mignon, a woman who appears to have combined the profession of a sorceress with the more practical one of a poisoner. She was the wife of a cook, and "for some time," says L'Estoile, "had laboured to procure her husband a place in the King's kitchen." She did not succeed and addressed herself to the Comte de Soissons, "and having found one day an opportunity of speaking to him, told him that it lay with him to become the greatest prince in the world.[2] The count, astonished at this proposition, told her to return, and warned the King, who named M. de Loménie to assist as a third at the conference, and he was concealed in a cabinet. The woman having returned, the count took her into his chamber, where she told him, if the King were poisoned, he would be the master, and that it was for that purpose that she was seeking someone who would be willing to introduce her husband into the kitchens. The count had her placed in the hands of the Provost, by whom she was examined and put to the question, and the Sieur de Loménie having been presented to her and having repeated what she had said, she ended by confessing her crime. She was burned alive in the Place de Grève."

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[1] According to L'Estoile, one of the Jacobins, a Fleming named Father Ridicoux, had been sent by the Papal Nuncio at Brussels.

[2] We confess we do not quite see how the death of Henri IV. would have made Soissons "the greatest prince in the world," since he was at that time only third in the line of succession, but perhaps she imagined that he would be able to seize the throne.

After the King's marriage to Marie de' Medici and the birth of a Dauphin, the attempts to get rid of the Béarnais were less numerous, and though now and again we read of someone being arrested on suspicion of harbouring evil designs against his Majesty, there is no record of anyone having been executed down to May 3, 1608. On that date, a Norman gentleman named Saint-Germain was beheaded in the Place de Grève, "for having, by charms and sorceries and some prickings of a waxen image, endeavoured to attempt the person of the King."[1] A surgeon, who is described as "very expert in his art, but a great sorcerer, with a great mass of grey hair on his head and a beard reaching to his waist," was hanged with him as an accomplice. Saint-Germain's wife, who had bribed one of the turnkeys of the prison to connive at her escape and fled to Flanders, was beheaded in effigy.

However, before another year had passed, the warlike projects of the King had begun to reawaken the animosity of his enemies, which this time produced a man who was to succeed where so many others had failed.

François Ravaillac—for that was his name—was born of very humble parents at Angoulême in 1578, and was therefore about thirty-two years of age. In appearance, he was tall and strongly-built, with broad shoulders, hair and beard of a dark reddish hue, sunken eyes and a dreamy, melancholy air. As a child, he is said to have evinced a mawkish—and for one so young—sickly inclination towards religious ceremonials, and was

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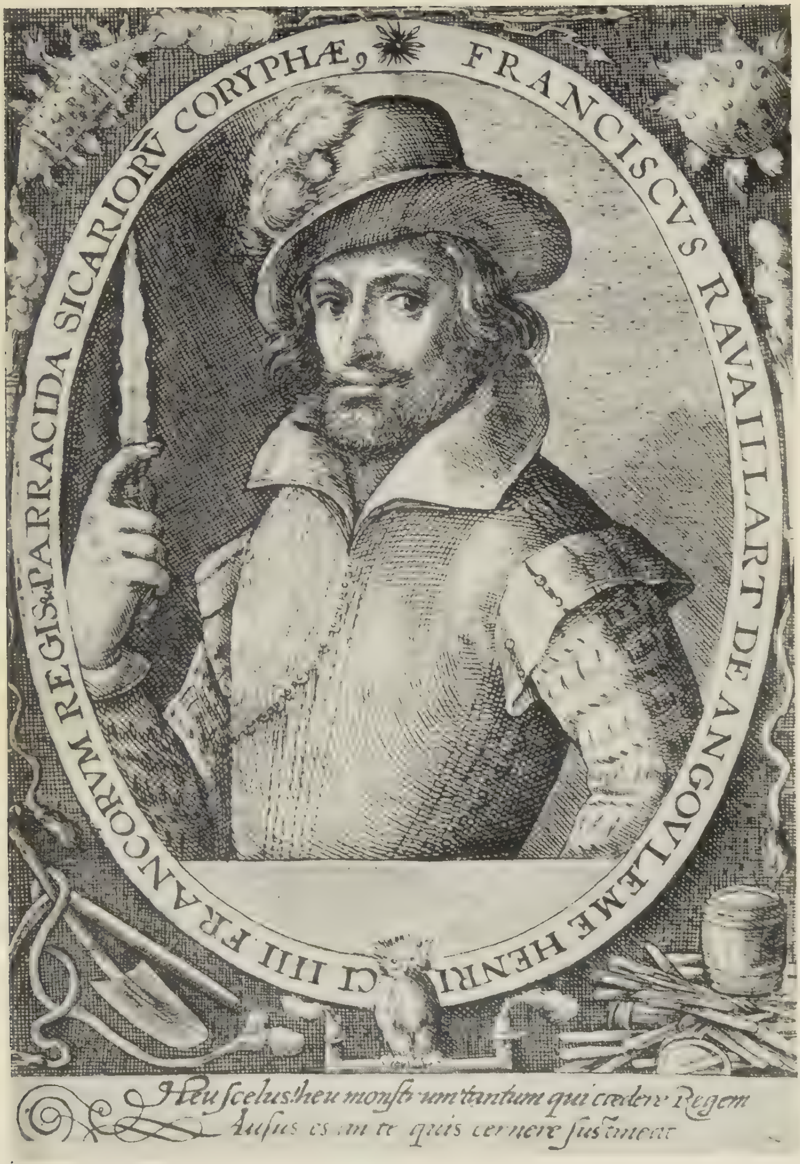
[1] L'Estoile.


FRANCISCVS RAVAILLART DE ANGOVLEME HENRICI IIII FRANCORVM REGIS PARRACIDA SICARIORV CORYPHÆ,
Heu ſcelus! heu monſtrum tantum qui credere Regem
Auſus es in te quis cernere ſuſtineat

François Ravaillac, assassin of Henri IV. of Navarre.

[*To face p.* 268.

more often to be found in church than attending to any duties that his parents might require him to perform.[1] As he grew older, he professed a great desire to enter the priesthood, but his family was so miserably poor that he was obliged to aid in its support, and accordingly he entered the service of a judge as clerk and *valet de chambre*. Having, in the former capacity, acquired some knowledge of law, he set up as a *solliciteur de procès*, that is to say, as a petty provincial attorney and a conductor of small cases in local courts. His earnings in this calling were, however, so meagre that he supplemented them by teaching the children of his own class to read and write, but, even with this addition to his income, he was scarcely able to keep himself from starvation.

After a time, he was thrown into prison for debt, and during his confinement his mind became more impregnated with fanaticism than it had hitherto been. On attaining his release, he began to frequent the society of the monks, attending the services in their chapels and consulting them on cases of conscience, and he wore under his clothes "a heart of cotton in which a canon of Angoulême had said there was a fragment of the true cross." Finally, he was admitted as a lay-brother to a convent of the Feuillants, but here he began to have hallucinations, declaring that he had visions in which the Virgin and various saints appeared and conversed with him, and, in a few weeks, the monks, becoming alarmed at the eccentricity of his behaviour, sent him away. Ravaillac then returned to Angoulême and fell back upon his former callings of attorney and schoolmaster to procure a living, which, if obtained at all, must have been of a very miserable kind. However, despite his poverty and the disordered state of his intellect, he appears to have led a perfectly honest life and was a good son to his mother, who adored him. A false charge was, nevertheless, brought against him of having been concerned in a murder, and, though he was immediately acquitted, he was again thrown into prison on account of the debts which he had accumulated in providing for his defence.

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[1] J. Bloundelle-Burton, "The Fate of Henry of Navarre."

During this second period of imprisonment, the hallucinations which he had previously experienced returned in a more pronounced form, and " he was conscious of fire, sulphur and incense," which was, he declared, a decisive proof against the heretics of the existence of Purgatory. One night, a few days after he was set at liberty, " he felt his face covered and his mouth by a thing that he was unable to discern, because it was at the hour of midnight, and, being in that state, had wished to sing the canticles of David, beginning *Dixit Dominus* to the end of the canticle, with the *Miserere* and the *De Profundis*, and it seemed to him that, as he sang them, he had in his mouth a trumpet similar to the trumpet used in war. . . ." In the morning, before it was day, when he blew on the embers of his fire to obtain a little light, he saw " immediately on both sides of his face, on the right and on the left, by the light of the fire, wafers similar to those with which it was customary to administer Communion to Catholics in the Church of God."

At this time he began to listen eagerly to sermons and conversations in which the question of the power of the Pope over kings and the dangers which threatened the Catholic religion were discussed, and gradually, since the vanity which so often precedes or accompanies insanity was strongly developed in him, came to the conclusion that he was born to play a great part and that Heaven had sent him into the world to become the Pope's principal champion and protector. From this to the belief that it would be his duty to kill any man who might contemplate making war upon his Holiness was but a step.

As yet, however, Ravaillac was still far from having formed any resolution to attempt the life of Henri IV. He believed that, if he could but obtain the ear of the King, he might so work upon him by his prayers and entreaties that not only would he be able to induce him to abandon any hostile intentions which he might entertain towards the Pope and the Catholics of Germany, but even to banish the Huguenots from the kingdom or compel them to conform to the Catholic faith. With this idea, in December 1609, he journeyed on foot from Angoulême to Paris, sleeping in church-porches and subsisting mostly on alms by the way, and went to the Duchesse d'Angoulême and Cardinal du Perron to solicit their good offices to obtain for him an audience of his Majesty. Since neither of them would accede to his request, on December 27, learning that on that day the King would pass by the Cemetery of the Innocents, he awaited his coach, and, when it appeared, cried out:

"Sire, in the name of Our Lord Jesus Christ and of the Holy Virgin, suffer me to speak with you!"

But he was driven away by the King's attendants and the people.

He returned to Angoulême. Here he learned that the rumour that Henri IV. was taking up arms for the Protestants of Germany had been confirmed. At the house of an acquaintance named Béliard, he heard it related "that the Ambassador of the Pope had said on his behalf to the King that, if he made war on the Pope, he would excommunicate him, to which his Majesty had answered that his predecessors had placed the Popes on their thrones, and that if his Holiness excommunicated him, he would depose his Holiness."

Then Ravaillac thought of killing the King. In April he returned to Paris, where he heard some soldiers declare that "if the King, who did not reveal his designs to anyone, intended to make war against the Pope, they would help him and die if need be for that." These words filled him with horror, "because to make war against the Pope was to make war against God, since the Pope was God, and God was the Pope."

He lodged at first at a humble inn in the Faubourg Saint-Jacques, but, finding this too far from the residence of his intended victim, he crossed the Seine and found a lodging at a hostelry called the *Trois-Pigeons*, at the corner of the Rue Saint-Honoré and the Rue Saint-Vincent, opposite the Church of Saint-Roch. At a tavern, the *Cinq-Croissants*, in the former street, he caught sight of a knife with a white handle and a long, slender, pointed blade lying on a table, and, taking advantage of a moment when there was no one looking, appropriated it. To the blade of the stolen knife he subsequently fitted a strong hartshorn handle and carried it about in a bag in his pocket. But now doubts arose in his mind as to whether he was justified in slaying even so bad a king as he considered Henri IV. to be, and, seized by weakness or remorse, he left Paris and took the road back to Angoulême. Striking his knife against the wall of the garden of Chantelou, near Châtres, he broke an inch off the point. But, in the faubourg of Étampes, he caught sight of a Cross on which was the Saviour bleeding and crowned with thorns. The Sacred Figure seemed to reproach him with his indifference and his infidelity. The words of the soldiers, the danger of the Pope, recurred to his mind. He turned again towards Paris and on a stone resharpened the point of his knife.

CHAPTER XVIII

Coronation of Marie de' Medici—Gloomy presentiments of Henri IV.—His conversation with Bassompierre and Guise on the morning of May 14, 1610—He leaves the Louvre in his coach to visit Sully at the Arsenal—Assassination of the King—The Duc d'Épernon saves the life of the murderer—Singular incident which immediately follows the assassination—The King's body is brought back to the Louvre—Behaviour of the Queen—"Madame, in France the King does not die!"—D'Épernon intimidates the Parlement into proclaiming Marie de' Medici Regent—Indescribable grief of the Parisians on learning the fatal news.

IN view of the fact that Henri IV. had decided to take command of the Army of Champagne himself, he had nominated the Queen to be Regent in his absence and instituted a Council of Regency composed of fifteen persons, in which everything was to be determined by a majority of votes. Marie de' Medici, however, had "a peculiar and ardent desire"[1] to be crowned and anointed, and represented to the King that, if this ceremony were performed, it would give her more dignity and prestige in the eyes of the people and strengthen the power which he was entrusting to her. The demand was legitimate in itself, for Queens married to Kings reigning and already crowned had had their separate coronations. But Henri IV. was reluctant to accord his wife this complement of authority. He had a very poor opinion of her intelligence. He had endeavoured to give her some instruction in affairs, but had found her so dull and apathetic that he had soon come to the conclusion that he was wasting his time. Moreover, he distrusted her entourage and particularly the two Florentines, Leonora Galigaï, who exercised the most absolute empire over the Queen, and her husband Concini. This camarilla was not only insatiably greedy, but inclined towards the Catholic Powers and acted in concert with the Nuncio Ubaldini. Marie de' Medici, a devout Catholic and the daughter of an Austrian archduchess, dreamed of marrying her two elder children to those of the King of Spain, and the approaching war against the House of Austria was wounding her in all her affections. The King therefore endeavoured to dissuade her, alleging the great expense and the loss of time; but the Queen insisted and he was obliged to give way. The coronation accordingly took place on May 13, at Saint-Denis, while her Majesty's State entry into Paris was fixed for the 16th.

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[1] Bassompierre.

"On Wednesday, May 12," reports L'Estoile, "the Queen went to Saint-Denis, accompanied by Mgr. le Dauphin, Madame, Queen Marguerite, Duchesse de Valois,[1] and several princesses and ladies. Two hours afterwards the King proceeded thither also, with all the princes and nobles of the Court. Thursday, the 13th, the Queen was anointed and crowned by the Cardinal de Joyeuse with all the solemnities, pomps, magnificences and ceremonies which it is customary to perform and observe: great applause, shouts and rejoicings of all the people, more pleased to see the calm and dignified bearing of her Majesty the Queen, who wore that day a countenance marvellously joyful, than the costly precious stones, diamonds, great white and oriental pearls, robes of cloth-of-gold and silver, sumptuous and magnificent, wherewith the Queen with her ladies and princesses were adorned and clothed."

The chronicler then describes the ceremony, which was assuredly the triumph of Marie de' Medici, who was about to find herself raised to power with her Italian entourage, at the moment when she had cause to fear the ruin of her ambitions, owing to the infatuation of the King for the Princesse de Condé.

"There was," he writes, "a great stage in the middle of the choir, situated before the grand altar, nine feet in height or thereabouts, with a high daïs, to which one ascended by two steps covered by a foot-cloth. There was the throne upon which the Queen was to sit, covered with velvet sewn with golden fleurs-de-lis, and above a canopy of the same material. The bottom of the staircase of the said stage was covered with crimson velvet sewn with embroideries of gold. On the right hand and on the left were other stages, some for the princes, chevaliers of the Orders of the King, gentlemen and other nobles; others for the Ambassadors and the Queen's ladies and maids-of-honour."

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[1] Marguerite de Valois, Queen Margot, the divorced wife of Henri IV., whom the King had persuaded to attend the ceremony, though much against her will.

After describing the benches covered with cloth-of-gold on which the prelates sat, the accessories of the coronation and the decoration of the church, the writer goes on to speak of the costume of Marie de' Medici, who was resplendent in "an ermine surcoat, enriched with diamonds, rubies and emeralds" and "a mantle, sewn with fleurs-de-lis and lined with ermine, the train of which was seven ells long," with her head flashing with jewels.

The coronation procession approached the church in the following order: First marched "the Swiss, attired in velvet tan-coloured, white, blue and carnation; the two companies of the Hundred Gentlemen in tan-coloured satin, with gold lace, or white satin for the doublet and hose of tan-coloured satin; the Gentlemen of the Chamber, chamberlains and others, in magnificent costumes; the Chevaliers of the Holy Ghost, all wearing the grand collar of the Order; trumpeters habited in blue velvet, the heralds with their coats-of-arms and the Ushers of the Chamber with their maces." The princes followed, "all dressed in cloth-of-gold in divers colours, the hood covered with precious stones, the cords of the toques made of pearls and diamonds." Then came the Dauphin, "dressed in cloth-of-silver, with cloak of the same, covered with diamonds and precious stones." Finally, appeared the Queen, "supported by two noblemen on behalf of the Ducs d'Orléans and d'Anjou, and the train of her mantle borne by the dowager Princesse de Condé, the Princesse de Conti, the dowager Duchesse de Montpensier and the Duchesse de Mercœur; and all the ladies, princesses and duchesses," with whom Marie de' Medici made her entry into the church.

In the church the Queen was received by the Cardinal de Joyeuse, the Cardinal du Perron and a great number of ecclesiastical dignitaries, bishops and abbots, and the ceremony began. The Cardinal de Joyeuse pronounced the formulas of the "*Sacre*" and performed the necessary unctions. He then successively placed the ring on the Queen's finger, the sceptre and the hand of justice in her hands and the crown upon her head. After this, Marie was led to the seat prepared for her, and the Cardinal celebrated Mass, at the conclusion of which he absolved the Queen and administered to her the Holy Sacrament. The crown, the weight of which it would have been impossible for the Queen to support for long, was then removed and replaced by a lighter one, adorned with diamonds, rubies and pearls, and the procession was reformed and the Queen escorted back to her apartments. In the evening their Majesties returned to Paris.

Bassompierre, in his "Mémoires," asserts that "the King on this occasion was extraordinarily gay," a statement which appears to be confirmed by the following incident which is related by L'Estoile:

"The King, pleased by this ceremony, preceded the Queen on the return and went into his chamber, where he placed himself at the window, and as she was passing beneath him, he found nothing better to do than to throw water over her."

On the other hand, according to a contemporary account of the ceremony, Henri IV. was in an unusually sombre mood, and, on entering the church and perceiving the vast silent assemblage, observed: "It reminds me of the great and last judgment; God give us grace to prepare well for that day!"[1]

We see no reason to doubt the accuracy of any of these assertions, since men of Henri IV.'s temperament pass very easily from gravity to gaiety or vice versa. But it is probable that his gaiety on this occasion was

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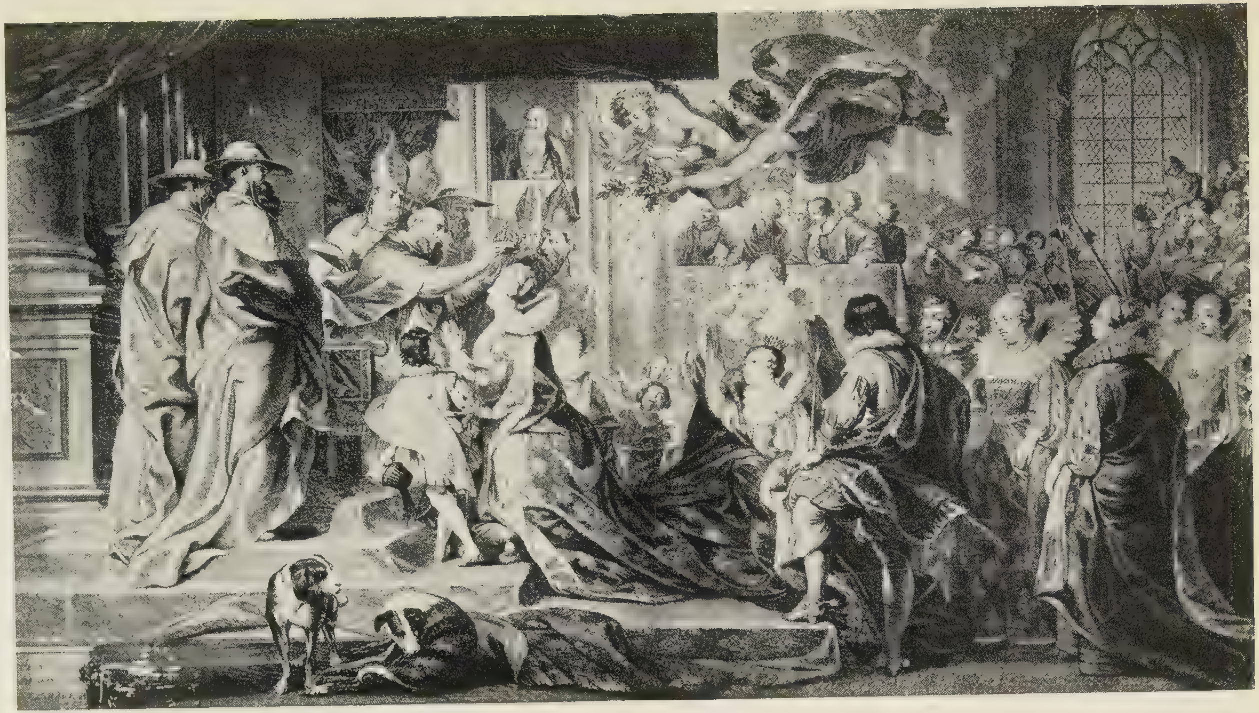
[1] "Cérémonial français," Vol. I., p. 270.



Coronation of Marie de' Medici, 1610.

After the painting by Rubens.

[*To face p.* 276.

just a little forced, since practically all authorities agree that, during the last days of his life, the King had quite lost his joyous elasticity of spirits. " Those about him," writes one of his historians, " complained that he had become morose and irritable, and lamented that he should be thus changed by the violence of his passion for the Princess of Condé. He himself, as we have seen, attributed his melancholy to this cause. But he had other and juster reasons for his disquiet. He was too humane and had too deep a sense of the value of peace to begin so great a war with a light heart. When he had drawn the sword before, it had been in self-defence ; but now he was the aggressor ; it was he who would have to render an account of the bloodshed and misery to come. Besides, he had too much experience not to know that the most careful precautions, the most artful combinations, avail nothing against the insolent caprice of Fortune. The success of his plans, everything, depended on his life. The thrust of a lance, a stray bullet, might, at the very moment of victory, prove more disastrous to the cause than the most ruinous defeat. He had dark forebodings that his life might be cut short before he had met the enemy."[1]

It may, at first sight, seem strange that Henri IV., who for twenty years had lived in the shadow of the assassin's dagger, who had schooled himself to despise the danger and had declared that life with such fears would be worse than death, adding that " he was in God's Hand and that he whom He guards is well guarded," should now have yielded to them. But the conviction was very general that Spain would not allow the King to put his threats of war into execution without having recourse to her wonted weapon,[2] and the Dutch

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[1] P. F. Willert, " Henry of Navarre and the Huguenots in France."

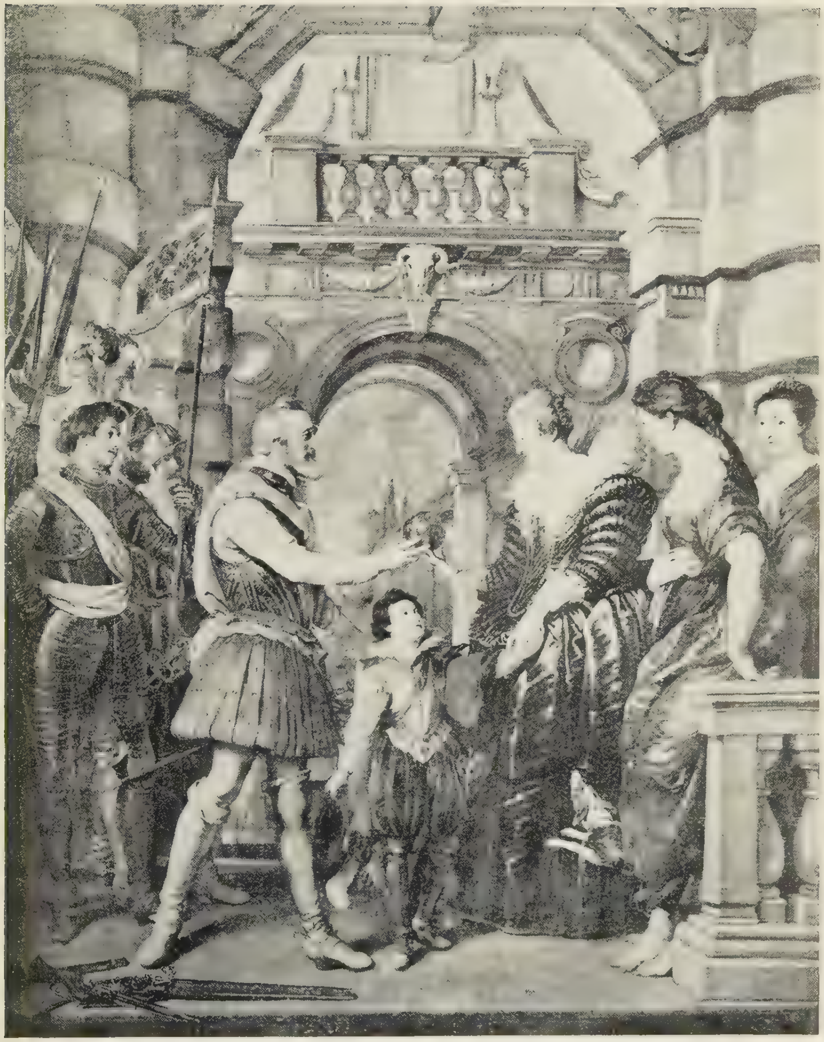
[2] "Letters arrived from Cambrai, Antwerp and other towns in Flanders, in which the King's death was spoken of three days, four days, ten days even before it happened. At Cologne and at Maestricht, eight days before the murder, they were shouting out in the streets that he had been killed, and they mentioned the instrument : a large knife."—M. Charles Merki, " La Marquise de Verneuil et la mort d'Henri IV."

Ambassador, d'Argens, had even begged Marie de' Medici to warn her husband to be on his guard. Henri's discernment could not fail to tell him that this conviction would never have been so widespread if, amongst all who possessed and expressed it, there were not some who knew only too well what was in the wind.

Sully has related how, during his visits to him at the Arsenal, the King would sometimes sit silent and pensive, tapping with his fingers on his spectacle-case, and then suddenly spring up, exclaiming: "*Pardieu!* I shall die in this city, I shall never leave it. They will kill me!" After which outburst, he would calm down, seat himself again and console himself by remarking that "what God had willed was inevitable and that a man must cheerfully bow to his destiny without attempting to oppose it."

Sully, as we know, is not always the most veracious of chroniclers; but the same objection cannot apply to Bassompierre, whose testimony where Henri IV. is concerned is generally regarded as unimpeachable. And this is what he says:

"I shall relate many things touching the presentiments which the King had before his death and which gave warning of the event. A little while before he said to me: 'I know not how it is, Bassompierre, but I cannot persuade myself that I am going to Germany, neither does my heart tell me that you are going into Italy.' Several times he said to me and to others also: 'I believe that I shall die soon.' . . . The following morning, the 14th of the said month (May), M. de Guise, passing by my lodging, took me to go and meet the King, who had gone to hear Mass at the Feuillants. On the way, we were told that he was returning by the Tuileries, upon which we went to intercept him and found him talking to M. de Villeroy. He left him, and taking M. de Guise and myself one on either side of him, said: 'I come from the Feuillants, where I saw the chapel which Bassompierre is having built there, and over the door has been placed this inscription: "*Quid*



Henri IV. entrusting the government to Marie de' Medici.

From the painting by Rubens.

[*To face p.* 278.

retribuam Domino pro omnibus que retribuit mihi?" And I said that, since he was German, he should have put: "*Calicem salutaris accipiam.*"' M. de Guise, laughing heartily, said to him: 'You are to my mind one of the most agreeable men in the world, and our destiny created us for one another. For had you been a man of medium station, I would have had you in my service, cost what it might; but, since God has made you a great King, it could not be otherwise than that I should belong to you.' The King embraced him and me also, and said: 'You don't know me now, but I shall die one of these days, and when you have lost me, you will know my worth, and the difference there is between me and other men.' Upon that I said to him: '*Mon Dieu*, Sire, why do you never cease to afflict us by saying that you will soon die? There is no felicity in the world like to yours: you are but in the flower of your age, in perfect health and strength of body, full of honours beyond any other mortal, in the tranquil enjoyment of the most flourishing kingdom in the world; loved and adored by your subjects; possessed of property, with a beautiful wife, beautiful mistresses and beautiful children, who are growing up. What more could you have or desire to have?' Then he sighed and said: 'My friend, all this I must leave.'"

Before parting from the King on that fatal day, Bassompierre informed him that he had received a complaint from the captains of the Light Cavalry, of which he had recently been appointed Colonel, that their companies were insufficiently armed and that they were unable to obtain the weapons which they required, and begged his Majesty to give instructions that these should be supplied to them. Henri IV. told him to come to him that afternoon at the Arsenal, where he proposed to visit Sully, who was ill, and he would direct the Minister to let him have the arms he wanted. And, upon Bassompierre remarking that he would very willingly give Sully at the same time the money that they were worth to enable him to replace them, he laughingly replied by quoting two verses from a well-known song:

> "Que je n'offre à personne,
> Mais à vous je les donne."[1]

On his return to the Louvre, Henri IV. dined, and afterwards spent some time in the Queen's cabinet, in conversation with his wife and two other ladies. Then he went to his own apartments, threw himself on his bed and tried to sleep. He could not do so, however, and, rising, went to the door and inquired of the exempt of the Guards on duty in the corridor what time it was. "Nearly four," was the reply, and at the same moment the clock of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois struck the hour. With the familiarity which the King encouraged between himself and his soldiers, the exempt said to him: "Sire, your Majesty looks tired and worried. You had better take a little air; it will refresh you." "Very well," answered the King; "order my coach; I will go to the Arsenal to see the Duc de Sully, who is ill."

The coach arrived, but the King, who had returned to the Queen's apartments, appeared quite unable to make up his mind to leave the Louvre, and kept repeating half to himself: "Shall I go? Shall I not?" At last, he announced his intention of going, and left the room, but went only a few paces, when he returned and said to Marie de' Medici: "*Ma mie*, shall I go?" She, seeing him so undecided, begged him to stay, but after some further hesitation he finally decided to go. "I wish to speak to M. de Sully," said he, "otherwise, I shall not sleep in peace. I shall but go and return, and shall be here within the hour." And, having kissed the Queen several times, he took leave of her and went to meet his fate.[2]

On descending to the courtyard, the King found Vitry, the Captain of the Guards, who wished to accompany him; but he declined his services and sent him to the Palais de Justice to hasten the preparations which the Parlement was making for the Queen's entry. Nor would he take with him any of the Guards, and his escort consisted merely of eight or ten running footmen, who ran or walked beside the coach, and some gentlemen on horseback.

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[1] Bassompierre, "Mémoires."

[2] Malherbe, "Lettres."

The coach in which Henri IV. set out for the Arsenal was one of those huge, clumsy contrivances then in use amongst the great, with its floor so near the ground that a moderately stout man could scarcely have crawled beneath it. Above it, supported by eight slim pillars, was a kind of roof or canopy, which more resembled the top of an open tent or summer-house than anything else.[1] On entering it, the King took his seat at the back, on the left, with the Duc d'Épernon on his right hand; facing him, by the door, were the Duc de Montbazon and the Marquis de la Force, while at the door, on d'Épernon's side, were the Maréchal de Lavardin and Créqui, who commanded the Gardes Françaises. In the front part of the capacious vehicle sat the Marquis de Mirebeau and M. de Liencourt, first equerry to the King.

The coach was open on both sides, the leather curtains with which it was furnished having been drawn back, on account of the fine weather and because the King wished to see the preparations: triumphal arches, artificial rocks, theatres, emblems, inscriptions of honour, figures and fictions drawn from the Bible and mythology, which were being made in Paris for the Queen's entry. On reaching the Croix du Trahoir, in the Rue Saint-Honoré, the King was asked which road he wished to take, and gave orders that they should take that which passed the Cemetery of the Innocents. The coach accordingly left the Rue Saint-Honoré and turned into the Rue de la Ferronnerie, which ran parallel with the cemetery, a very narrow street at this period, which there had long been a question of widening.[1] Several vehicles blocked the street—it has even been asserted intentionally—amongst others a cart laden with wine-casks and another filled with hay. The royal coach was obliged to graze the shops, which were principally occupied by vendors of scrap iron, and at last, finding further progress impossible, came to a stop near the Rue de la Lingerie, before a shop or tavern which bore the sign of the Salamander.[2] Most of the footmen then left the coach in order to pass through the cemetery and rejoin it at the end of the Rue de la Ferronnerie. Two only remained, but one had gone forward to assist in clearing the street, and the other was bending down to refasten his garter. The gentlemen who accompanied the King on horseback had been obliged to fall behind. There was therefore no one to prevent a person from approaching the coach.

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[1] J. Bloundelle-Burton, "The Fate of Henry of Navarre."

Henri IV., with his right arm resting on d'Épernon's shoulder, was listening to a letter which the duke was reading to him, when suddenly a man sprang on to a mounting-block—a common enough object in those days in the streets of Paris—which the coach was almost touching, and from it on to the axle of the near hind wheel, and struck at the King with a knife. The man was Ravaillac. For days he had been prowling round the Louvre; since the morning he had been dogging his intended victim's footsteps. When he learned that the King had ordered his coach, he had exclaimed, as he afterwards confessed: "I have thee; thou art lost!" He had followed the slow-moving equipage from the

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[1] In 1554, Henri II. had signed letters-patent ordering the widening of this street, which was the most direct route from the Louvre to the Château des Tournelles, in the Rue Saint-Antoine, and of which he must have often experienced the inconvenience. But the Tournelles were demolished after the death of Henri II., and, in consequence, the improvement was not carried out.

[2] Malherbe says opposite the shop of the "Crowned heart pierced by an arrow." But it is very difficult to-day to fix the exact site of this. The probability, however, is that it stood on the spot occupied by No. 11 or No. 14 of the present street, the latter house being the nearest to the Rue de la Lingerie.

Louvre, and the block in the Rue de la Ferronnerie had given him his opportunity.

The assassin's first blow glanced off the body between the armpit and the left breast, inflicting merely a flesh wound.

"*Ah ! je suis blessé,*" cried Henri IV.

"What is it, Sire ?" inquired Montbazon anxiously.[1]

"*Ce n'est rien ! Ce n'est rien !*" answered the King, but the last words were almost inaudible, for Ravaillac had struck a second blow, which pierced the left lung and severed the venous artery. He endeavoured to strike yet again, but only pierced the sleeve of Montbazon, who was supporting the King in his arms. The hapless monarch, blood streaming from his mouth, was already dead.

His crime accomplished, the assassin made no attempt to escape ; he remained standing by the coach, the fatal knife in his hand and a dazed expression on his face. Saint-Michel, one of the gentlemen who had followed the King on horseback from the Louvre, drew his sword and would have run him through, as La Guesle had Jacques Clément after the murder of Henri III. But d'Épernon stopped him. "Do not strike him," he cried, "on pain of your life !" And he gave orders for Ravaillac to be arrested, and conducted to the Hôtel de Retz, which was close at hand.

It was at this moment that a singular incident occurred. The Baron de Courtemer, another of the gentlemen who had followed the King, was, at La Force's request, hastening to the Arsenal to inform Sully of the tragedy, when he encountered a little way down the street, a band of ten or a dozen armed men, of whom two were on horseback, who cried out : "Death to the assassin. Slay him at once ! He must die now—on the spot !" And they were about to throw themselves upon Ravaillac, when Courtemer drew his sword and ordered them back, while d'Épernon cried: "Harm him not! Your lives for it if you touch him." Thereupon they turned about and disappeared in the crowd which was flocking into the Rue de la Ferronnerie from all the neighbouring streets.

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[1] It is not strange that Montbazon should have asked this question, since not one of those in the coach—there were five, without speaking of the two on the front seat—was ever willing to acknowledge that he had seen the King stabbed.

"Who were these men? Why were they there?" asks the Comte de la Ferrière. "Were they hired by the Duc d'Épernon and la Verneuil? Did they come also to slay the King, and, finding the business done and taking Ravaillac for one of themselves, wish to get rid of him to assure impunity?"

M. de la Ferrière's answer is that the episode constitutes "one of those mysteries which history has bequeathed to us and of which the secret has remained impenetrable."[1] But, as we shall see in the succeeding chapter, some writers are not of this opinion.

The excitement in the street was by this time indescribable, and to calm to some degree the ever-increasing crowd surging around the royal coach, d'Épernon called out that the King was only wounded. The leather curtains of the coach were then closed, and it returned to the Louvre.

Towards five o'clock, Marie de' Medici was in her cabinet with the Duchesse de Montpensier, when she heard a great commotion and people shouting: "Bring wine! Bring a surgeon!" as was customary when an accident had occurred. Uneasy, she opened the door of the King's bedchamber and hurried across it into his grand cabinet, where she caught the sound of subdued voices and of heavy steps ascending the staircase. They were those of the King's escort who were bringing back the lifeless body of their master.

On learning the fatal news, Marie gave way to the most uncontrollable grief, "making all the Louvre resound with tears and extraordinary lamentations."[2]

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[1] "Henri IV.: le Roi: l'Amoureux."

[2] Bassompierre, Richelieu, Fontenay-Mareuil and, in fact, all the best contemporary authorities are in accord with regard to the grief shown by Marie de' Medici. On the other hand, the Fontanieu manuscript,

But almost immediately Sillery, the Chancellor, came to her, holding by the hand the little prince who was already no longer the Dauphin.

"Monsieur," cried the Queen, "is the King dead then?"

"Madame," replied the Chancellor rather sharply, "in France the King does not die!"

He indicated the little boy and added more kindly:

"Here is the King, Madame!"

At this moment, the fact that Henri IV. was dead was not known except at the Louvre and at the Couvent des Augustins, where the Parlement was temporarily housed, as the Palais de Justice was then being prepared for the coronation fêtes of Marie de' Medici. On his return to the Louvre, d'Épernon had taken counsel with the Duc de Guise, and they had despatched a number of their friends on horseback through Paris to announce that the King was only wounded. Then the two nobles repaired to the Augustins, where d'Épernon, "holding his sword in his hand, but in its sheath, informed Messieurs that they must give orders for the safety of the State and name the Queen Regent, in view of the fact that her son was under age." So threatening was the tone in which he spoke that the assembly was quite overawed, and, after a show of deliberating, the Regency was proclaimed and a deputation sent to the Louvre to inform Marie de' Medici.

When at length the news of the King's death spread through the capital, the grief of the people was indescribable, and "everyone cried, wept and lamented, great and little, young and old."[1] For, with the

to which we have already had occasion to refer, says: "The astonishment was great at the little grief which she (the Queen) testified at the King's death." Saint-Simon, who, of course, wrote more than a century later, though he had access to sources of information which few historians have possessed, affirms that the Queen received the news of her husband's death with "a presence of mind, an indifference and an indecency which occasioned scandal." The first writer is, however, obviously very hostile to Marie de' Medici, while, as is well known, Saint-Simon's prejudices often caused him to pervert facts in the most flagrant manner.

[1] L'Estoile.

exception of a small section of fanatical Catholics, which had never forgiven him for having been a Huguenot and for continuing to protect his co-religionists, Paris had ended by loving the Béarnais, and citizens, like L'Estoile, who that morning had waxed indignant over the debauchery of the Court and the greed of the tax-gatherers, now wept for "the greatest king in the world and the best."

CHAPTER XIX

Trial of Ravaillac—His barbarous execution—He persists up to the end in declaring that he has had no accomplices—Horrible scene which follows the execution—Jacqueline d'Escoman, a former waiting-woman of Madame de Verneuil, accuses the marchioness and d'Épernon of having instigated the murder of Henri IV.—She appears before the Parlement—She is arrested and brought to trial on a charge of making false accusations—Madame de Verneuil and d'Épernon summoned to appear—They are privately examined by the First President, Achille de Harlay—His significant answer to an inquiry from the Regent—The trial is adjourned—Harlay resigns the office of First President, and his successor proves more amenable to Court influence—All the persons incriminated by d'Escoman declared innocent and their accuser sentenced to perpetual imprisonment—Her *mémoire justificatif*—Had Ravaillac really accomplices?—Contention of M. Charles Merki that the assassination of Henri IV. was "a vengeance of women" considered—Probability that the crime of Ravaillac merely anticipated another attempt upon the King's life.

MEANWHILE, the assassin had been conducted to the Hôtel de Retz, where he was subjected to a preliminary examination. From the first, he denied that he had been instigated to commit the crime by anyone, and when they continued to press him, replied, jesting: "Take care that in the end I do not say that it was you!"

From the Hôtel de Retz, Ravaillac was presently removed to the Conciergerie, where he was confined in a cell in "the square tower," which was without doubt the Tour de l'Horloge, "seated and tied in a chair, with fetters on his feet and his hands bound behind his back." During the next three days he was examined by the First President, Achille de Harlay, President Jeannin and others. But, unless torture were resorted to, "there was no appearance that he would ever reveal or confess, still less denounce any of his abettors or accomplices, since from day to day he became more resolute and obstinate." On May 18, therefore, the court which had been constituted to try him decided that he should be put to the *question extraordinaire.* It was to no purpose, however, for Ravaillac still persisted in denying that he had been " induced, counselled or paid to commit the said deed." His sole motives, he declared, were those which we have mentioned elsewhere, namely, that the King was the protector of the Huguenots and intended, as he had heard, to make war on the Pope.

All kinds of rumours were in circulation ; people accused the Duc d'Épernon, Madame de Verneuil, the Spaniards, the Jesuits,[1] the Queen herself.[2] It was obviously advisable that the affair should be terminated with as little delay as possible, and it was doubtless for this purpose that Marie de' Medici had nominated Jeannin—" a man belonging to her, upon whom she could reckon," says Tallemant des Réaux—to direct it. Jeannin pushed matters on, and on May 27, thirteen days after the crime, the court declared Ravaillac " duly attainted and convicted of the crime of lèse-majesté divine and human in the first degree, for the very wicked, very abominable and very detestable parricide committed on the person of the late King Henri IV., of very noble and very honourable memory," and condemned him, after first being put to the *question*, " for the revelation of his accomplices," to the awful punishment reserved for regicides.

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[1] A Jesuit, one Father d'Aubigny, to whom Ravaillac had confessed before his crime, was summoned before the court. The assassin, it was asserted, had shown him " a portion of a knife, on which there was a heart and a cross, declaring that it was to kill the King if he refused to convert those of the Religion (*i.e.*, the Huguenots)." But d'Aubigny denied everything, even to having seen Ravaillac, being naturally very unwilling to be mixed up in the affair. Few believed him, however, and L'Estoile reports that a violent quarrel took place between Loménie and Father Cotton, the former openly accusing Cotton and other Jesuits of having instigated the murder of the King.

[2] Marie de' Medici, very probably with the intention of giving the lie to these sinister rumours, professed the utmost animosity against the murderer of her husband, and actually sent her equerry to inform the judges that a certain butcher had offered " to flay this wretch alive, promising to make him last a long time and to leave him sufficient strength after he was despoiled of his skin to endure the punishment."—Pierre Matthieu, " Histoire de la mort déplorable d'Henri IV."

In accordance with the expeditious habits of the time, the sentence was executed that same day.

" At ten o'clock in the morning," reports the " Journal de L'Estoile," " at the rising of the court, Ravaillac was brought into the refreshment-room, where he was ordered to kneel down. Then the registrar pronounced his sentence, which everyone has heard and seen and can read everywhere in print, in accordance with which, in order to cause him to reveal his accomplices, he was subjected to the torture of the *brodequins*,[1] during which he confessed nothing ; and after they had thrown water over him and given him wine, he merely entreated the Court, the King, the Queen and everyone to pardon him, recognizing anew that he had committed a great crime, but declaring that he had not been entreated, solicited or induced by anyone, ' although he did not doubt that there were many who were very pleased by it.'

" At three o'clock, they took him from the chapel to go to the punishment, and from the said chapel up to the gate of the Conciergerie all the prisoners hooted him fiercely and shouted : ' Death to the traitor ! Death to the dog ! ' and they would have thrown themselves upon him, if the archers who stood there strongly armed had not prevented them. On going out to mount into the scavenger's cart, he found so great a concourse and multitude of people, excited and infuriated, that the guards and archers, although in great number and, as has been said, armed to the teeth, had great difficulty in protecting him from its fury, each one endeavouring to lay hands on him, men, women, girls and even little children, with such tumult, shouts and yells, imprecations and maledictions that one could not hear another speak. They were not, indeed, able to save him from many cuffs and blows, and some women imprinted upon him the marks of their teeth and nails, so great was the fury which the people showed."

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[1] " The horrible torture known as *les brodequins*, which was similar to the old Scottish torture of the ' boot,' was administered in the following manner: A wooden boot was placed on the foot and leg, and into it were hammered wedges of iron growing larger and larger, until the miserable sufferer either answered in the manner desired or was unable to answer anything at all, through his having swooned from the agony of his crushed leg."—J. Bloundelle-Burton, " The Fate of Henry of Navarre."

From the Conciergerie, Ravaillac was conducted to Notre-Dame, before the principal door of which, wrapped in a sheet and with a lighted torch in his hand, he performed his penance and, in the phraseology of the time, made his "*amende honorable à Dieu.*" Thence, the cart bore him to the Place de Grève, where the wretched man saw the preparations which had been made for his barbarous execution: the pincers which were to tear his flesh, the cauldrons of molten lead, boiling oil and pitch which were to increase the torment of his lacerated body, the four great horses which were to dismember him. One of these horses appeared to be tired or unwell, whereupon, amidst a great roar of applause from the multitude, a mounted man alighted from his own horse and led it up to take the place of the other. It was then that Ravaillac gave utterance to words which, if they are correctly reported by L'Estoile, would be of great significance, as appearing to indicate that he had committed the crime at the instigation of others:

"*They greatly deceived me when they endeavoured to persuade me* that the blow I struck would be well received by the people, since it furnishes itself horses to tear me to pieces."

But other writers give these words differently, and, anyway, L'Estoile's accuracy would seem to be negatived by the account which the chronicler himself gives of Ravaillac's conduct in his last moments:

"Having demanded a *Salve Regina* of the people, it was refused with tumult and violence by the populace, who began to shout more than before that it was not necessary for him and that he was damned like Judas. He turned again then towards his confessor, M. de Filesac, who had been given him with M. de Gamaches, both honest and learned men, virtuous men and amongst the leading and most competent doctors of theology in all the Sorbonne. He entreated him to give him absolution ; but the confessor refused, saying that that was forbidden, if he declined to reveal his abettors and accomplices. Ravaillac asserted that he had none, as he had always protested ; however, M. de Filesac refused in any way to do more. 'Give it me then,' cried the assassin, 'at least conditionally, in case what I say be not true ; it is a thing which neither you nor any other person is able to refuse me.' 'I consent to it,' then replied the confessor, 'but on this condition, that in case it be not so, your soul, on leaving this life, will go straight into hell to all the devils ; which I declare to you from God as being quite certain and infallible !'"

Before this incident occurred, Ravaillac's right hand, holding the knife with which he had committed the crime, had been struck off, and he had been eight times subjected to the excruciating torture of the pincers, followed by the application of "molten lead, boiling oil and pitch and a mixture of wax and sulphur." While enduring these torments, the *greffier*, standing by, had exhorted him to reveal the names of his accomplices, to which he replied : "I have already said and I say again that it was I alone who did it."

Finally, the horses were brought, and at the third strain of the animals, which, according to Matteo Botti, the Tuscan Ambassador, were assisted by persons dragging at the ropes, the poor wretch expired.

The last scene was perhaps the most horrible of all, for, as the executioner, after dismembering the corpse, was about to cast "the members and quarters into the fire," the populace rushed upon them, tore them in pieces and carried them off. "There was not a good mother who did not wish to have her piece. They burned the flesh at all the crossways," and even at the Louvre, where Marie de' Medici might have seen the Swiss roasting some under the balcony of her apartments !

Ravaillac was dead, declaring with his last breath that he had no accomplices, but it was the almost unanimous belief of the time that he had been only an instrument, and people were confident that sooner or later those who had instigated him would be discovered. And, in point of fact, before many months had passed, it seemed as if this belief was about to be justified.

On January 11, 1611, the Queen of Navarre, Marguerite de Valois, was hearing Mass in the Church of Saint-Victor, when a good-looking woman of the middle-class approached her:

"Madame," said she, "do you recognize me?"

"Yes, I recognize you," answered Marguerite, after a moment's hesitation. "You are Jacqueline d'Escoman.[1] It is you who came to me to ask me to take you into my service."

"That is true, Madame. . . . I have grave revelations to make concerning the death of the late King. I pray you deign to listen to me."

The Queen at first refused, but, impressed by the woman's earnestness, ended by yielding to her entreaties, and told her to come and see her at the magnificent hôtel which she had built for herself on the left bank of the Seine, opposite the Louvre.

The woman came, and so soon as she was alone with Marguerite, said:

"I know all those who incited that miscreant (Ravaillac) to attempt the King's life: they are the Duc d'Épernon and the Marquise de Verneuil. I am ready to depose to it in a court of law."

She then proceeded to relate a most extraordinary story:

At a date which is not mentioned, but would appear to have been sometime in 1607, she had entered the service of Madame de Verneuil as a waiting-woman. In that capacity, at Christmas 1608, she accompanied her mistress to the Church of Saint-Jean-en-Grève to hear Father Gontier preach. One evening, on entering the church, the marchioness went to a pew in which a man was sitting, in whom d'Escoman recognized the Duc d'Épernon. During the whole of the service the two conversed together in low tones ; but not so low that the waiting-woman, who was kneeling behind them and listening very attentively, was unable to overhear part of what they said. And from this she gathered that the subject of their discussion was a plot against the life of the King.

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[1] Her maiden name was Jacqueline le Voyer, and she had, when very young, married a man called Isaac de Varennes, Sieur d'Escoman or Coman, though whether he had any right to this title is doubtful. Little is known about this man, except that he was at one time a soldier in the Guards, and his wife had been living apart from him for some considerable time.

Some days later, the narrative continues, Madame de Verneuil, who had gone to Marcoussis, sent her a man with the following note :

"Madame d'Escoman, I send you this man by Étienne, a *valet de chambre* of my father ; I recommend him to you ; take care of him."

This man was none other than Ravaillac.

She received Ravaillac without seeking to ascertain who he was, gave him dinner, and obtained a bed for him at the house of one Larivière, a confidant of her mistress, though he continued to take his meals at Madame de Verneuil's hôtel. One day when he was breakfasting, she inquired the reason of the interest which the marchioness appeared to take in him, to which he replied that it was on account of the care which he took of M. d'Épernon's affairs. On this assurance, she brought him some legal documents to elucidate, but on her return he had disappeared, and she saw him no more for some months. Surprised at these suspicious occurrences, d'Escoman endeavoured to insinuate herself into the confidence of her employer, and learned that a man named Ledain was being employed by Madame de Verneuil to correspond with Spain.

Finally, Madame d'Escoman determined to reveal what she knew before it was too late. She approached the Comte de Schomberg and Mlle. de Gournai, a friend of Montaigne, but they both declined to be mixed up in the affair, and also a certain M. de la Madeleine, who, however, did not even reply to the letter in which she asked for an appointment. Meantime, Madame de Verneuil had become suspicious as to the fidelity of her waiting-woman, believing that it was she who had caused the King to be informed of certain matters—probably her affair with the Duc de Guise—which had caused his Majesty a good deal of irritation. But, instead of dismissing her from her service, she sent her to lodge at the house of Mlle. du Tillet, a clever little hunchback woman and a confirmed *intrigante*, who was the mistress of d'Épernon, where she was subjected to a strict surveillance

It was here that, on Ascension Day 1609, she again met Ravaillac, who had just returned from a journey to the Château of Malesherbes, and who informed her of his murderous designs against the King. Terrified, she hurried to the Louvre, where she saw one of the Queen's waiting-women and begged her to obtain for her an audience of her Majesty, on a matter of the last importance which concerned the safety of the King and the Dauphin. But she was informed that it was impossible for the Queen to receive her that day, as she was about to set out for Chartres. On her return, three days later, Marie de' Medici, recalling what her waiting-woman had told, sent for Madame d'Escoman to come to the palace. However, after the latter had waited nearly the whole day for the expected audience, she was told that the Queen "had forgotten" and had gone to Fontainebleau.

Far from being discouraged, Madame d'Escoman wrote to another of the Queen's waiting-women, hoping through her to obtain an interview with the King. But she received no answer, and on the Day of Corpus Christi she once more saw Ravaillac. With tears in his eyes, he declared to her that he had repented of his criminal design and entreated her to say nothing of what he had revealed to her to anyone. This she promised him, but, as she had no faith in his repentance and felt more convinced than ever of his evil intentions, she went to the convent of the Jesuits and asked to see Father Cotton, Henri IV.'s confessor.

Father Cotton was not there, being at Fontainebleau with the Court, but she was seen by the Procurator, who listened to her story, but refused to take it seriously.

"See to it," said she, "that Father Cotton warns the King."

"I will do what God will counsel me," answered the Jesuit. "Good woman, go and pray to God!"

"You take me, I see, for a mad woman," cried d'Escoman, "but if you allow the King to be slain, may ill fortune come upon you! I shall go, if need be, on foot to Fontainebleau, and I shall accuse you."

Thereupon the Procurator changed his tone and promised to inform their Majesties. But he did not keep his promise, and a few days later d'Escoman found herself in prison. She had had a child whom her husband had refused to recognize and whom she had put out to nurse. As she had no money to pay for the child's maintenance, and the woman to whom she had entrusted it refused to keep it any longer, in despair she took it back and exposed it on the Pont-Neuf. Caught in the act, she was imprisoned at the Hôtel Dieu and afterwards at the Châtelet, brought to trial and condemned to death. On appeal, however, the sentence was commuted to one of detention in a convent, her husband being ordered to pay a hundred francs a year towards the cost of her maintenance, if he were unwilling to take his wife back. The money was not forthcoming, however, and, at the end of some months, she recovered her liberty.

During her detention, she had informed several people of the danger which threatened the King, and even charged one of the Queen's apothecaries to warn her. So soon as she was set at liberty, she again endeavoured to see Marie de' Medici, but without success, and the murder of Henri IV. took place without her being able to prevent it. Since she had failed to save him, she wished to punish the guilty, and, despairing of ever being able to obtain the ear of Marie de' Medici, had decided to appeal to Queen Marguerite.

Such, in brief, was the story which Jacqueline d'Escoman related to the Queen of Navarre.

Marguerite appears to have sincerely mourned her former consort. She was too intelligent not to have appreciated his great qualities and the irreparable loss which France had sustained by his death; too generous-hearted not to have long since forgiven him his conjugal failings, and, indeed, since the divorce, Henri IV. had treated her with unvarying kindness. Extravagant as some of the woman's charges may have seemed to her, she felt it to be her duty to endeavour to get to the bottom of them, but, before allowing the matter to go further, she wished to know what effect it would produce upon d'Épernon, who was directly incriminated. She accordingly told d'Escoman to come again on a day she named, and wrote to the duke, begging him to call and see her "on a matter of importance." On his arrival, she concealed him behind a partition and awaited that of his accuser.

When d'Escoman appeared, the Queen said to her:

"Repeat now what you related to me."

"Madame, I declared to you that the murder of the late King was plotted in the lodging of Mlle. du Tillet, the mistress of the Duc d'Épernon, by him and Madame de Verneuil. In the troubles which could be foreseen in consequence of the crime, the marchioness hoped to marry the Duc de Guise, who was to become Regent; Madame de Verneuil's son was to be King and the Duc d'Épernon Constable."

The duke did not wait to hear any more. Boiling with rage, he emerged from his hiding-place and endeavoured to intimidate d'Escoman, but she held her ground stoutly, refused to retract a word of what she had said, and demanded to appear before the Parlement.[1]

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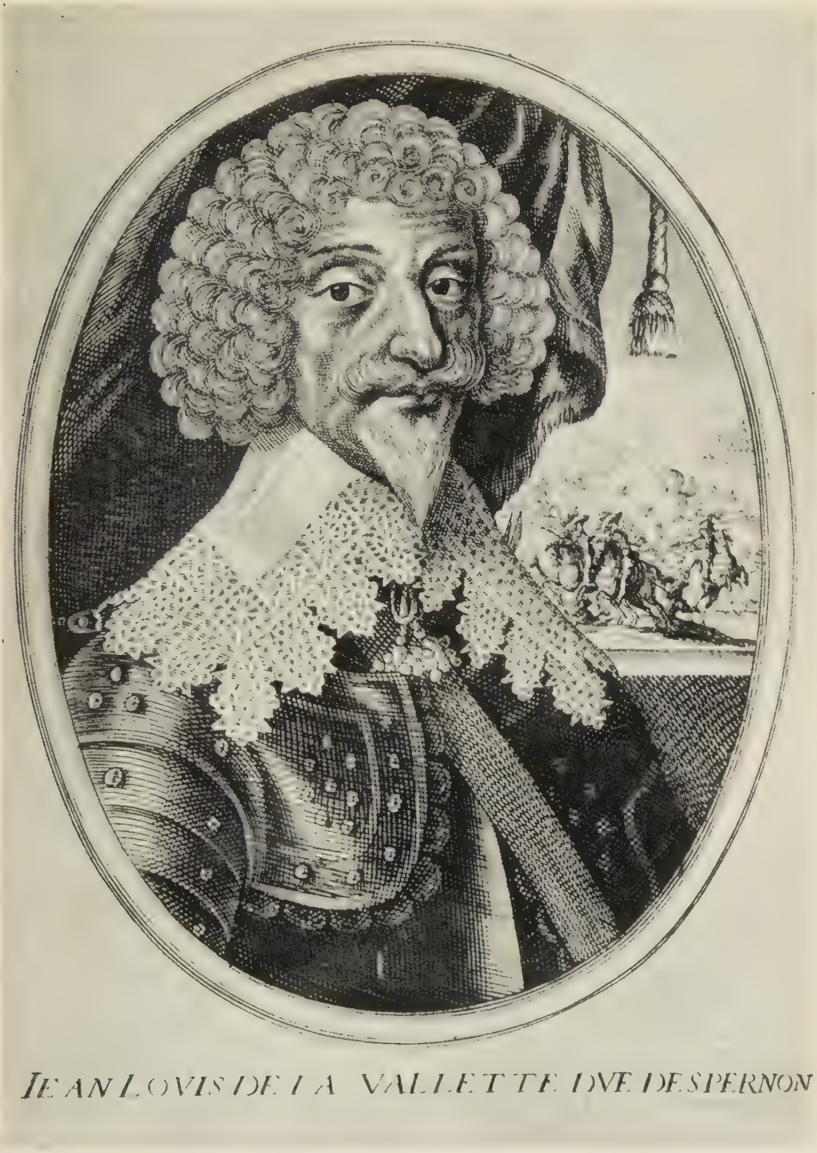
[1] Relation of Foscarini, Ambassador of Venice, cited by La Ferrière.


IEAN LOVIS DE LA VALLETTE DVE DESPERNON

Jean Louis de La Vallette, Duc d'Épernon (1554–1642).
After a painting by an unknown artist, once in the possession of Mme. de Sévigné.

[*To face p.* 296.

To the Parlement the affair was accordingly submitted, and d'Escoman was first examined by Jeannin, the ally of Marie de' Medici.

"Why have you not made these revelations sooner?" he asked her.

"Because I have been prevented."

"Why do you do so now?"

"To ease my conscience."

On January 17, d'Escoman was arrested and committed for trial on a charge of making false accusations, which was, of course, only what she had expected.

It was at this moment that an incident which had occurred some time before began to assume a sinister significance.

On the day of the King's death, says L'Estoile, at the same hour, indeed, at which Henri IV. had been assassinated, the Provost of Pithiviers, near which town the Château of Malesherbes was situated, "playing or watching a game of bowls in a garden, was accused and convicted by credible witnesses of having said: 'The King is dead. He has just this moment been killed; do not doubt it.'" He had, it appeared, held such language before, but no one had paid much attention to it. Now, however, it was very different, and so soon as the King's assassination was known, he was suspected of being one of the accomplices of the murderer. He bore, besides, an evil reputation, being regarded as "a robber and extortioner and a bad servant of the King," but "he was on very good terms with the Entragues family, and particularly with the Marquise de Verneuil." Anyway, he was arrested and brought to Paris, where he was imprisoned in the Conciergerie. But, a few days later, he was found dead in his cell, "strangled with the strings of his drawers."

He was on the point of being brought to trial; however, a dead man does not speak, and, "if he had gabbled, as he had so well begun, he would, without doubt, have ended by saying too much *for those whom it was not desired to displease*." This certainly would appear to have been now the opinion of the inhabitants of Pithiviers and the neighbourhood, who, the chronicler tells us, went about saying: "*Mon Dieu*, how the death of this wicked man has come in the nick of time for M. d'Entragues, the marchioness his daughter and all those of his family! Even if it were the devil who had interfered, he would have rendered them all a great and important service."[1] It was certainly not the devil who was concerned in the affair, but it looked as though an embarrassing and too talkative witness had been suppressed at the instance of important personages who had reason to fear what he might reveal.

On February 9, d'Escoman was confronted with Mlle. du Tillet. Both women indulged in the most violent recriminations, each reproaching the other with the life she had led, and the latter, of course, denied *in toto* the allegations of d'Escoman. But a *valet de chambre* of Mlle. du Tillet declared that *both of them had known Ravaillac* and had on several occasions provided him with food, evidence which made a great impression on the judges. D'Escoman completed her depositions by asserting in regard to the Provost of Pithiviers: "It is the marchioness who caused him to be killed by one of her relatives, from fear that torture would wring from him compromising revelations."

After further examinations, the Procurator-General called for the penalty of death against d'Escoman, who, in addition to false accusations, he declared to be guilty of "sorcery, coining and other crimes besides." The Parlement, however, refused to entertain this demand, and the First President, Achille de Harlay, admonished the Procurator-General severely, accusing him of ingratitude towards the late King, who had been his benefactor, and ordered him to withdraw, which he did. The Advocate-General, Servien, then proposed that the Duc d'Épernon should be summoned to appear, together with Madame de Verneuil, whom he stigmatized as the duke's accomplice. To this the court consented, and Harlay immediately caused the duke to be informed of its decision. "Despite his great age," writes the Venetian Ambassador, Foscarini, "he has recovered all his energy and is determined to go to the end to discover the truth."

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[1] L'Estoile.

D'Épernon, on learning of the way in which the Advocate-General had spoken of him, was furious, and swore that he would have his life, but the Princes of the Blood took the courageous lawyer under their protection. Booted and spurred and with his sword by his side, the duke proceeded to the Palais de Justice and, presenting himself before the First President, demanded to know why he had been summoned to appear. The old man rebuked him sharply:

"I have nothing to say to you," said he; "I am your judge." And when d'Épernon, somewhat abashed, rejoined that he had asked him as a friend, he replied:

"I have no friends; I shall do you justice; be content with that."

On January 30, d'Épernon and Madame de Verneuil were examined by Harlay at his own house. The examination lasted four hours. The next day, Marie de' Medici sent one of her gentlemen to the First President to ask what he thought of the affair.

"You will tell the Queen," was the answer, "that God has prolonged my life into this century to see and hear there marvellous things, so great and so strange that I never believed it possible to see and hear them while I lived."

And when one of his friends spoke to him of this woman who was accusing everyone, even the greatest in the kingdom, apparently at random and without proofs, he exclaimed, raising his eyes to Heaven and throwing up his hands with a gesture of despair:

"There are only too many proofs; there are only too many! . . . Would to God that we did not see so many!"

D'Épernon and Madame de Verneuil desired that d'Escoman should be put to the *question*, in the hope that she would retract her charges against them. But Marie de' Medici refused to consent to this, not from pity, but from fear that torture, instead of inducing her to retract, might lead her to make fresh accusations. "She is a bad woman who accuses everyone," she remarked; "she might perhaps accuse me myself." The Regent's one desire, indeed, seems to have been to hush up the affair, which explains why the examinations of d'Épernon and Madame de Verneuil were in secret, and that nothing was ever known of what transpired in the course of them.

Finally, the trial was adjourned, and when it was resumed six months later, Harlay was no longer First President. He had resigned the office which he had filled with so much distinction for thirty years, and had been replaced by Verdun, ex-President of the Parlement of Toulouse. Verdun was a very different stamp of man from his predecessor, and proved only too amenable to Court influence. The result was that on August 10, 1612, the Parlement declared the Duc de Guise, d'Épernon and Madame de Verneuil and other persons whom d'Escoman had incriminated entirely innocent of the charges she had brought against them, and sentenced their accuser to perpetual imprisonment and to be shut up "within four walls" in the Couvent des Filles Repenties.[1] "If she has not been condemned to death," writes Giustiani, who had succeeded Foscarini as Venetian Ambassador, "it was because she was held to be mad, and, above all, through fear of a popular insurrection."[2] "This last phrase," remarks La Ferrière, "is worth remembering."

D'Escoman lived for twenty years in the cell in the Couvent des Filles Repenties in which she had been shut up like a wild beast. She never retracted anything of what she had said at her trial, and a *mémoire justifi-*

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[1] Nine judges pronounced for death, nine for imprisonment, and the accused therefore received the lighter penalty.

[2] Despatch of August 10, 1612, cited by La Ferrière. In the opinion of Foscarini, she was perfectly sane, and we find the same view expressed in the "Journal de L'Estoile."

catif which she wrote during her imprisonment and which has been preserved, concludes with these touching words :

"I shall pray God that it may please Him to put it into the hearts of true Frenchmen to do justice upon the accomplices and authors of this parricide.

"I shall pray Him all my life, in this place in which I am miserable, content and resolute for the truth."

But now it is necessary to say something concerning that question which has been so warmly debated for three centuries, and will probably continue to be debated until the end of time : Had Ravaillac really accomplices, and who were they ?

The great bulk of modern opinion accepts Ravaillac's own account of his motives and his repeated declarations which no torture could shake that he alone conceived the crime, though, at the same time, many historians do not fail to point out that the Jesuits and other Ultramontane preachers, whose fierce denunciations of heresy and of the King who permitted the accursed thing to remain in the midst of his people to draw down God's judgment upon them had undoubtedly wrought upon the distempered imagination of the assassin, cannot escape some share of responsibility. In the minority, however, are several distinguished writers, not the least distinguished of whom is M. Charles Merki, whose very able work, "La Marquise de Verneuil et la mort d'Henri IV.," we have frequently had occasion to cite in the course of this volume ; and his arguments are so interesting that we need make no apology for reproducing them at length.

". . . The conduct of the Duc d'Épernon is rather suspicious in this history, and although, in order that he might be brought to justice, he saved the life of the assassin, whom the valets and people of the King's suite were going to kill immediately, as Jacques Clément was formerly killed, he was, we know, one of the first to come forward to take advantage of the King's death, and, apart from numerous facts which indicated subsequently their good understanding, we may recall that it was with him, at Loches, that Marie de' Medici went to take refuge, when, in 1619, she escaped from the Château of Blois.

"Henriette d'Entragues, was she amongst the accomplices? Mlle. d'Escoman brought her into the case without doubt, and one ought not to forget that Ravaillac, according to what was said in the accusation, was received at her house and therefore was acting for her, without perhaps discerning very clearly her feminine knaveries. But what in reality was her rôle in this dramatic incident? Still, to-day, one is reduced to conjectures, and, in perusing the documents of the time, it seems that one is bending over a world of tittle-tattle and intrigues. Was she the accomplice of the assassin? Was she at last avenged of her manifold mortifications, from Henri IV.'s promise of marriage down to the pseudo-judicial comedy in which she saw herself implicated, and which the King had conducted so far as the condemnation in order to make her womanly pride at length give way. She knew, besides, that, with the insensate love of the monarch for Charlotte de Montmorency, she would be sacrificed even as mistress, and one might maintain that she had no rest until after having prepared and contrived the catastrophe in which her lover was to disappear. The other women did not trouble her, even though they enjoyed the transient favours of the King; it was on account of that one only that she showed herself implacable. Ravaillac has, no doubt, denied all complicity, but one must be permitted to make an observation: Too much importance is attached in general to the declarations of an individual, simply because he must die; it seems to me, on the contrary, that, for him who is about to disappear, there should be a final bitter gratification in the last lie by which he will dupe posterity.

"Assuredly, Henriette lost much with the death of the King, so little attached to her as he still was, and when the regency was going to fall to her rival, the Italian woman, whom she had so long pursued with her gibes and sarcasms. But it is necessary to take into account the rancour which had long filled that head, even if romantic. She had been able to plot for a long while, weighing the advantages and the risks, the tragedy which terminated the reign of Henri IV. ; the great skill of this woman—one could not admire it too much—was to screen herself constantly, to contrive that she should not be troubled.

"Would she have been able to do this, however, without the connivance of Marie de' Medici ? Woman's hatred is very perspicacious ! and there are, besides, indirect proofs of their good understanding. In the evening of May 14, the young Verneuil was placed under the guard of an exempt and two archers, which was a necessary precaution in view of the intrigues of Spain. But, seized with alarm, the marchioness sent to inquire of Marie de' Medici if she might remain in France in all security. 'I shall always have consideration for those who loved the King my husband,' replied the Queen ; 'she may appear again at Court ; she will be welcomed by all.'

"Well, Marie de' Medici was jealous as much as she was foolish, jealous not from love, but from self-love, for she was infatuated with herself and was unable to understand that Henri IV. should prefer another ; she was Italian, and of the same family as Catherine, whose lack of scruples we know ; finally, 'sweetness and affability were contrary to her nature,' says L'Estoile. But the legitimate wife and the mistress were able to associate their rancours. It is impossible to affirm it, for there are only presumptions ; but one is thus able to explain why the proceedings against Henriette d'Entragues had no consequences. Marie de' Medici 'passed the sponge' over them, because she had always to fear the scandal of inopportune revelations. The assassination of Henri IV. remains therefore a vengeance of women —not from love, let us repeat, for a man of fifty-six years is unable to inspire such passions : from mortification at the situation she had lost with the one; from fear of the future with the other. The King's death composed everything.

"But we can understand from that time the melancholy of Louis XIII., quite young still, but well informed in reference to matters of which we catch only a glimpse through contradictory narratives, and the harshness with which, later, he treated his mother. When he exiled her after the death of Concini, he saw her go without shedding a tear; the corpse of the Béarnais was always stretched between these two.

"No doubt, there are no proofs, absolute, flagrant proofs; there are only presumptions. But the death of Henri IV. after the coronation of Saint-Denis made the Queen all-powerful. He could disappear, and with him the council of regency which he had appointed. Marie de' Medici, who had been able to fear being sent back to Florence, gained everything with the crime of Ravaillac—and well believed that she had lost nothing."

Now all this, as we have said, is extremely interesting, and may at first sight appear extremely plausible also. But with due respect to M. Merki, who is not only a very charming, but a very erudite writer, his contention that "the assassination of Henri IV. was a vengeance of women," seems to us to be based on very insufficient grounds, and we are inclined to think that the strong, though not unnatural prejudice which he reveals throughout his work against both these women has perhaps led him to exaggerate the importance of d'Escoman's accusations and, at the same time, to ignore some very vital facts.

With a woman like Henriette d'Entragues, malice, the desire for revenge, no doubt counts for much, but it is not stronger than self-interest, and Henriette, as we know, never allowed the first to outweigh the second. And, if Henri IV. were dead, what had she to gain? Nothing, for, if, as M. Merki supposes, there was an understanding between her and Marie de' Medici, there could, of course, be no question of the young Verneuil becoming King, which, according to d'Escoman, was the plan of the conspirators.

And if she stood to gain nothing, she risked losing much, for Henri IV. had been a generous friend to her, and, even if he had ceased to love her, she could still count on receiving from him far greater favours than she could ever hope to obtain from Marie de' Medici.

Then, again, there were the interests of her children to be considered. Could she reasonably expect that the Regent or Louis XIII., when he assumed the reins of government, would be as ready to advance them as their own father ?

Despite, therefore, d'Escoman's so-called revelations, to which M. Merki appears to us to attach undue importance, the case against Henriette is, in our opinion, a weak one, while against Marie de' Medici there is really no case at all.

M. Merki alleges that the motive which led Marie de' Medici to compass, or, at any rate, to acquiesce in, the murder of her husband was fear—the fear of being repudiated and sent back to Florence, in order that the King might marry the Princesse de Condé. We entirely decline to believe that Henri IV. could ever seriously have contemplated so preposterous a proceeding, which would have rendered him an object of ridicule from one end of Europe to the other. And on what conceivable grounds could he have asked the Pope to dissolve his marriage to a woman who had already borne him six children ? The only way in which he could have obtained a divorce was by reverting to the Protestant faith—which would, of course, have meant civil war—and declaring that the Pope had had no power to annul his first marriage. But that would not have enabled him to espouse his Dulcinea, since Queen Marguerite was still living.

M. Merki further asserts that Louis XIII.'s harsh treatment of his mother after the death of Concini was due to the conviction that she had been privy to his father's murder and that " the corpse of the Béarnais was always stretched between them." This may have been true, because the young King's favourite, Luynes, had not hesitated to insinuate the most shameful things against the Queen-Mother, with the object of setting her son against her. But such an impression was certainly not permanent; otherwise, Marie de' Medici would scarcely have been recalled to Court, notwithstanding that she had raised the standard of civil war, and permitted to acquire such influence over Louis XIII. that she succeeded in obtaining his consent to the disgrace of Richelieu, though, happily for France, the King very quickly changed his mind.

In regard to d'Épernon, his case stands on a different plane from that of Madame de Verneuil or the Queen. The former favourite of Henri III. was a greedy, ambitious and utterly unscrupulous man, to whom that King's successor had never been anything but an intruder. His powers for mischief had been severely curtailed by Henri IV., who, it was rumoured, intended to curtail them still further. D'Épernon, therefore, had very strong reasons for wishing to see the King removed, and he gained much by his death and probably expected to gain even more than he did. It should also be remembered that the duke was the head of the ultra-Catholic and Spanish party, whose loyalty to France was of very doubtful value, and, as such, probably in close touch with the Court of Madrid.

But, if Madame de Verneuil or Marie de' Medici or d'Épernon were guilty of conspiring against the life of Henri IV., it is in the highest degree improbable that they conspired with Ravaillac, since, as we have said elsewhere, the great bulk of modern opinion has decided that Ravaillac had no accomplices. From such facts as have come down to us, it seems, indeed, very difficult to think otherwise. If Ravaillac had been the tool of conspirators, leave alone wealthy ones, would he, it may well be asked, have been ill clad and half-starved, as he undoubtedly was? Would he have been constrained to steal the very knife with which the crime was committed? Would he have been reduced to such straits that he declared—and there seems no reason to doubt him—that if his opportunity to assassinate Henri IV. had not come on the 14th of May, it could never have come at all, as he had but three *testons*—about two livres—left, and had decided to abandon his design and leave Paris that night? Finally, would he have made repeated attempts to obtain an interview with the intended victim, with the object of persuading him to abandon his heretical allies and convert or exterminate his heretical subjects, and thus spare him the necessity of taking his life?

But by far the strongest argument against the theory that Ravaillac had accomplices—and, it appears to us, an overwhelming one—is the conduct of the assassin on the scaffold. M. Merki asks us to believe that Ravaillac went to his death with a lie on his lips, experiencing a bitter gratification in thus deceiving posterity. In regard to a man of Ravaillac's type, such a contention seems to us absolutely untenable. Ravaillac was a religious fanatic; he killed Henri IV. because he believed that he was the enemy of the true faith, and for that faith he was prepared to sacrifice his own life and to suffer a horrible death. "To him," writes Mr. Bloundelle-Burton, "religion, or what, in his perverted and distraught mind, he believed to be religion, was all that he had in the world; to him, absolution ere he left the world was the only thing he required to make his parting from existence easy to him. To obtain the latter he swore so solemn an oath, and gained it under so awful a pledge, that it would have been impossible for him not to believe that, even as his soul went forth to meet its God, he would have damned that soul to all Eternity had he sworn falsely."[1]

M. Jules Loiseleur, who, in his day, enjoyed a not undeserved reputation as an unraveller of historical mysteries, and, in more recent years, the late Mr.

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[1] J. Bloundelle-Burton, "The Fate of Henry of Navarre."

Bloundelle-Burton, have both endeavoured to prove that Ravaillac's crime anticipated by only a few moments another attempt upon the King's life by the band of armed men which, it will be remembered, appeared in the Rue de la Ferronnerie immediately after the murder.[1] Space forbids us even to summarize the arguments of these two writers, and it will therefore be enough to say that between them they have succeeded in making out a very strong case against these men and also against d'Épernon, whom they both charge with being the employer of the supposed bravoes.

Whether they are right or wrong, however, it is practically certain that there was a conspiracy against the life of Henri IV. on foot, and very probably more than one, and also that the Court of Madrid was implicated. Everything points to it: the persistent rumours of the King's death in foreign countries, and particularly in Flanders, days before it actually occurred; Henri's gloomy presentiments that his end was near at hand, due, without doubt, to vague warnings which had reached him, of some of which he perhaps did not care to speak;[2] the indecent exultation of the Spaniards at the murderous blow which had removed their great enemy,[3] and, finally, the disappearance from the Spanish archives and from those of their allies of all documents covering the period immediately preceding and following the crime. This last circumstance is perhaps the most significant of all.

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[1] "The Fate of Henry of Navarre." Loiseleur, "Ravaillac."

[2] Foscarini told the Queen of Navarre that, after the King's death, a letter from the Princesse de Condé was found amongst his papers warning him that it was intended to make an attempt on his life; and he had also been advised "not to go out on the 14th, because there was great danger."

[3] When the news of the murder reached Madrid, the Archbishop of Toledo said to Philip III.: "Your Majesty ought to impress upon your mind the words of St. Paul: '*Si Deus pro nobis, quis contra nos?*'" The Spanish Court went into mourning, but the people exulted openly; the courtiers declared that it was a "miraculous blessing" from Heaven, and the clergy from the pulpit gave thanks to the "Divine Omnipotence."

CHAPTER XX

Complete reversal of Henri IV.'s policy by the new Government—Troubled regency of Marie de' Medici—Marriage arranged between the Duc de Guise and the widowed Duchesse de Montpensier opposed by Madame de Verneuil, on the ground of the marriage-contract which the duke has signed with her—Guise repudiates his signature—The Comte de Soissons, the Cardinal de Joyeuse and d'Épernon chosen to arbitrate upon the matter—The Regent intervenes and obliges Henriette to withdraw her opposition to Guise's marriage—Temporary reconciliation between the two women—It is ended by Marie de' Medici intervening on behalf of Bassompierre in the suit brought against him by the marchioness's sister, Marie d'Entragues—Henriette definitely retires from Court—Marriage of her daughter Gabrielle de Verneuil—Last years and death of Madame de Verneuil.

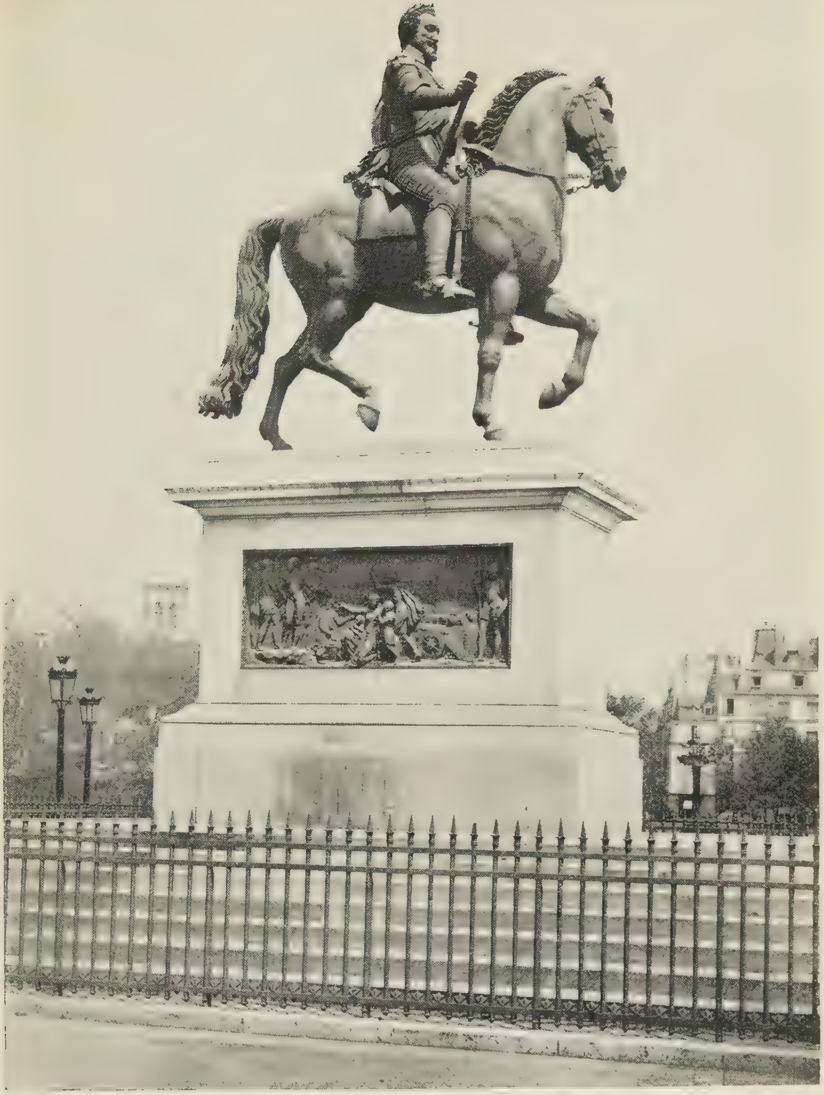
HENRI IV.'s dream of a monarchy which should be triumphant both within and without the realm vanished with him. His warlike projects and his crusade against the House of Austria were abandoned, and Spanish and Jesuit influence dominated the Court of France, with the result that, in 1612, a double marriage was arranged, Louis XIII. being betrothed to Anne of Austria and Madame Élisabeth to the future Philip IV. As for Sully, he was disgraced, and the millions which he had amassed for the war squandered by Marie de' Medici on her unworthy Italian favourites and on the returned Condé and other princes and nobles, for the purpose of securing their support for the new régime. Such ill-advised liberalities served only to inspire contempt for the feeble Government and to whet the appetite of the grandees, whose quarrels, revolts and threats of revolt, all of which had no other object than to aggrandize themselves at the expense of the Crown, make up the history of the regency of Marie de' Medici. When, at last, in 1616, the Queen-mother summoned up courage to clap Condé into the Bastille, that prince had succeeded in extorting from her over six million livres, while, during the same period, Mayenne had obtained two millions, Nevers 1,600,000, Longueville 1,200,000, Bouillon a million and Vendôme 600,000, without speaking of the pensions and offices which they had secured.

In the midst of these troubles, of this shameful rapacity, people already regretted the strong hand of the dead King, and Madame de Verneuil is said to have observed:

"Oh! if our little man were able to return, how he would seize the scourge and drive all these merchants out of the temple!"

But "the little man" slept in the vaults of Saint-Denis, and, if Henriette had really contributed to his end, which we decline to believe, she had already good cause to repent of it. For, despite the comedy of an official reconciliation, Marie de' Medici, now all-powerful, had suffered too much through her to forgo altogether the satisfaction of avenging herself; nor were opportunities wanting.

At the end of 1610, a marriage was arranged between the Duc de Guise and the widowed Duchesse de Montpensier, to whose heart Henri IV. had once unsuccessfully laid siege. But, less than two years before, Guise, as we have already mentioned, had given a promise of marriage to Madame de Verneuil—a promise which was perfectly in order—and it was in her power to oppose the projected union. The duke made overtures to the lady, in the hope of arriving at some arrangement, but without result. Evidently, she was determined to punish her faithless admirer and that, if she could not be Duchesse de Guise and take rank after the Princesses of the Blood, no other woman should occupy that coveted position. Guise, furious at his discomfiture, then resolved to declare that he had never signed the marriage-contract which Madame de Verneuil had in her possession. The Comte de Soissons, the Cardinal de Joyeuse and d'Épernon were chosen by the parties to arbitrate upon



Statue of Henri IV. (Paris).

[*To face p.* 310.

the matter, and the document was laid before them. After examining it, they decided to summon the notaries who had drawn it up; but one of them was dead, and the other, a very old man in feeble health, fearful, no doubt, of offending so great a personage as Guise, absolutely denied that he had had anything to do with the affair. Henriette, however, asserted her good faith so stoutly, and was so warmly supported by Soissons, who had reasons of his own for wishing to prevent Guise from marrying Madame de Montpensier, that in all probability the decision would have been in her favour, when the Regent took upon herself to intervene.

Marie de' Medici disliked Soissons and desired to conciliate the Guises, while the temptation to checkmate her former rival was difficult for her to resist. She therefore sent Jeannin to Madame de Verneuil to tell her that " it would be agreeable to her if she were willing to waive her objections to the proposed marriage," and Henriette, to whom the Minister did not fail to point out the impolicy of offending at the same time the Regent and the House of Guise, felt obliged to obey.

The Duc de Guise, delighted at this result, undertook to reconcile Madame de Verneuil with the Queen, promising that this time the reconciliation should be a real one. After some difficulty, he succeeded, and for a time the marchioness appears to have been quite a welcome visitor at Court. But this good understanding did not last very long, for the vindictive Italian could not forgo an opportunity of mortifying her rival, and had the meanness to strike at her through her younger sister, Marie d'Entragues.

Marie had in her possession a promise of marriage from Bassompierre, by whom she had had a son. As that gallant declined to carry it out, the lady, urged on by her relatives, brought an action against him before the Parlement of Rouen to compel him to make her his wife. In ordinary circumstances, she would, in all probability, have won the day, but Marie de' Medici sent the *maître des requêtes* Marillac to Rouen, with letters in her own hand to the judges recommending Bassompierre's cause, and they gave their verdict in his favour. Poor Marie d'Entragues deserved a better fate, for she was a beautiful and charming girl, and appears to have been sincerely attached to her faithless lover.[1]

The years passed; Concini, who had blossomed into the Maréchal d'Ancre, was assassinated; Leonora Galigaï, declared guilty of *lèse-majesté* and sorcery, was executed in the Place de Grève; Marie de' Medici was exiled to the Château of Blois, and Louis XIII., or rather his favourite Luynes, assumed the reins of government. Madame de Verneuil saw nothing of these events; comprehending that, now that she had lost her protector, she had ceased to be a person of importance and not caring to play a secondary part, she had definitely retired from Court.

The marchioness, however, emerged from her retirement for a short time at the end of 1622, when her daughter, Marie Angélique de Verneuil, was married with great splendour in the cathedral at Lyons to Bernard de Nogaret, Marquis de la Valette, d'Épernon's second son. The King and Queen and the whole Court attended the ceremony, amongst those present being Richelieu, who had just been made cardinal. Madame de Verneuil gave her daughter a dowry of 100,000 écus, and Louis XIII. one of twice that amount.

The marriage of this legitimated daughter of France was doomed to unhappiness even before it had taken place. At the betrothal ceremony, the Marquis de la Valette, "seized with jealousy," slapped his future wife's face before all the Court. Frightened for his half-sister, Louis XIII. begged her to break with a man of so violent a temper, but she refused. Four years later, she died in childbed, and it was rumoured that her death was due to her husband's ill-treatment or to poison.[2]

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[1] See the author's "A Gallant of Lorraine" (Hurst and Blackett, 1921).

[2] Madame de Motteville, "Mémoires."

Last Years of Madame de Verneuil

Madame de Verneuil did not long survive her ill-fated daughter. During her last years, if we are to believe Tallemant des Réaux, she became a slave to the pleasures of the table, in consequence of which she grew enormously stout. That sylph-like figure which Henri IV. had so much admired eventually acquired an amplitude exceeding even that of Queen Marguerite, who, in her old age, the same chronicler tells, found doors through which she could not pass.

Like so many *amoureuses*, including the aforesaid princess, Henriette, towards the end of her life became very devout and charitable, and in 1622, she founded the Couvent des Annonciades Célestes, which was constructed in the Marais, near the Hôtel de Sévigné.

Henriette d'Entragues, Marquise de Verneuil, Comtesse de Beaugency, Baronne de Villiers Saint-Paul, died at Verneuil on February 9, 1633, at the age of fifty-four.

Henriette's son, Gaston Henri de Verneuil, Duc de Verneuil and Bishop of Metz, who succeeded to all her property, after being an ecclesiastic until 1666, abandoned Holy Orders and was appointed Governor of Languedoc. Four years later, "weary of celibacy at the age when it becomes a necessity," he took unto himself a wife, in the person of Charlotte de Séguier, the widowed Duchesse de Sully, daughter-in-law of Henri IV.'s great Minister. He died in 1682, without issue, and the duchy became extinct. The Château of Verneuil passed, in 1784, into the possession of the Condé family.

More fortunate than Henriette d'Entragues, the Comtesse de Moret, after the death of her royal lover, secured a husband. In 1617, she married the Marquis de Vardes, the last offshoot of that illustrious house which traced its descent from the Maréchal du Bec, the companion of St. Louis in his fatal African expedition.[1] From this marriage two children were born, a daughter, who married the Duc de Rohan, and a son, that dashing Marquis de Vardes who became the favourite of Louis XIV. and of the ladies of his Court, and counted amongst his numerous victims the then Princesse de Condé, the Duchesse de Roquelaure, and Olympe Mancini, Comtesse de Soissons. Finally, however, he became too presumptuous, and having spoken lightly of Henrietta of England, Duchesse d'Orléans, to whose love he had ventured to aspire, he was, on that princess's complaint, given a taste of the Bastille and afterwards banished from the Court.

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[1] La Ferrière.

As for Charlotte de Montmorency, Princesse de Condé, the cause of so much trouble, she returned to France after the death of Henri IV., and having disavowed the compromising letters in which she had addressed the Vert-Galant as " my all " and " my dear knight," was officially reconciled to her husband. Condé, however, could not easily bring himself to forgive her, and the tie between them would appear to have been for some years merely a nominal one. When, however, in September 1616, Condé was arrested and sent to the Bastille, the princess went to Marie de' Medici and very generously begged to be permitted to share her husband's imprisonment. Her request was refused, but, after the disgrace of the Queen-mother, Louis XIII. permitted her to rejoin Condé, with whom she was subsequently transferred to the Château of Vincennes, where she remained until the prince was set at liberty in 1619.

The result of the reconciliation between husband and wife was the birth of two children, Anne Géneviève de Bourbon-Condé, Duchesse de Longueville, the heroine of the Fronde and, in later life, the protectress of the Jansenists, and Louis II., Prince de Condé (" the great Condé ").

Charlotte de Montmorency appears to have preserved her remarkable beauty to an advanced age. " Her beauty was still great," writes Madame de Motteville, " when in my childhood I was at the Court, and it lasted to the end of her life. We praised it without flattery."

The same writer attributes to the princess a remark which has sometimes been misinterpreted :

" What a pity that the Cardinal di Bentivoglio (the Papal Nuncio at Brussels while she was there) did not become Pope, so that I might be able to boast of having had *amants* of all conditions : popes, kings, cardinals, princes, dukes, marshals of France, even simple gentlemen ! "[1]

By the word " *amants* " Madame de Motteville undoubtedly intended the reader to understand admirers and suitors, certainly not successful lovers, for, though Charlotte de Montmorency was no doubt an incorrigible flirt, there is no reliable evidence of her ever having been unfaithful to her marriage vows.[2] She appears to have been one of those cold, vain women, who, insatiable for admiration, take pleasure in inspiring passions which they are incapable of returning.

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[1] Lenet tells us that the princess once said to him : " Do not be astonished if the Cardinal di Bentivoglio has flattered me in the portrait which he has drawn of my beauty. He was very much in love with me ; I have a favourable star which makes me beloved by old men."

[2] Tallemant des Réaux, upon whose unsupported testimony we should hesitate to condemn anyone, accuses her of having had an intrigue with the Cardinal de la Valette, who, he says, squandered so much money upon her that when he died, in 1640, his revenues were mortgaged for ten years ; other writers give her as lovers Chavigny and Bassompierre, whom she was to have married. But this is probably mere gossip.

THE END

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